natural help for herpes

Learn more about this surprisingly common condition, and explore some natural drug alternatives

By Mark Stengler, ND

Herpes is a common condition caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV-1, also known as a cold sore, usually appears on the lips. Recurrent clusters of blisters and lesions in the genital area characterize HSV-2, or genital herpes. It is estimated that up to 80 percent of the American adult population has had oral herpes, while 20 percent of adolescents and adults have genital herpes. Symptoms of an outbreak may include the following:

- Tingling, itching sensation
- Red, sensitive skin
- Flu-like symptoms (swollen glands, headache, muscle ache, fever)
- Appearance of one or more painful blisters or bumps
- Blisters open and then heal as new skin forms

Conventional treatment primarily involves oral and/or topical antiviral therapy that is used during an outbreak or daily to suppress and prevent outbreaks. Oral medications such as valacyclovir may cause side effects including headache, dizziness, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting.

Foods and Remedies to Try

Natural therapies can be effective in reducing the frequency and duration of herpes outbreaks, as well as preventing them. Genital herpes or facial herpes that has spread to the eyes should be monitored by a doctor.

Test-tube studies demonstrate the amino acid L-arginine (found in nuts, wheat, chocolate, and peas) promotes the herpes virus, and should be avoided. The amino acid L-lysine (found in legumes, turkey, fish, chicken, red meat, and most vegetables) suppresses the virus.

In a double-blind trial, 3,000 mg per day of lysine in divided doses led to a decrease in severity of symptoms and a reduction in healing time of both oral and genital herpes. For acute outbreaks, take 1,000 mg of lysine three times daily between meals. A good dose to prevent outbreaks is 500 to 1,000 mg three times daily between meals.

Topical lysine treatments have also been shown to be effective in clinical trials and are widely available at health food stores.

Applying lemon balm topically is helpful in the treatment of oral and genital herpes. For example, a study published in the journal *Phytomedicine* demonstrated topical lemon balm was effective for the treatment of cold sores. Of 66 patients with a history of recurrent cold sores (at least four episodes per year), 34 received treatment and 32 got a placebo. Users of the cream, which was applied to the affected area four times daily over five days, healed faster, and had a reduction of typical herpes symptoms such as itching, tingling, burning, stabbing pain, swelling, tautness, and redness. The cream also prevented spreading of the infection. Topical lemon balm is available at health food stores; lemon balm tincture can also be used.

The topical use of propolis, a substance gathered by bees from the buds and bark of trees, has been shown to be effective for genital herpes. A study involving 90 men and women with recurrent genital herpes compared the healing and symptom-remediying properties of propolis to acyclovir and placebo. Thirty individuals were placed in each group. After 10 days of treatment, 24 in the propolis group, 14 in the acyclovir group, and 12 in the placebo group had healed. The healing process and reduction in symptoms appeared to be faster in the propolis group. Apply propolis cream or spray to the affected area four times daily until the lesions have healed.

Aloe vera is also effective topically for oral and genital herpes. A double-blind trial using a 0.5 percent aloe vera cream found that applying the cream three times a day shortened the healing time of genital herpes outbreaks.