



Shingles (Herpes Zoster)



Overview

This is a viral infection that usually affects older people. It makes your skin break out in a rash that can be very painful.

Causes

Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus. That's the virus that causes chickenpox. After you've had chickenpox, the virus can get inside your nervous system. It can live there for many years without causing problems. But it can reactivate at any time. When it does, it causes a shingles outbreak.

Symptoms

Shingles often begins with burning, tingling, itching or numbness on your skin. Most people feel this on only one side of the body. After several days, you break out with a rash of blisters in one area or on one side of your body. The blisters may itch. They may be painful. It's common to get them in a band around one side of your torso. They can form on one side of your face or neck. Along with the blisters, you may have fever, headache, fatigue and sensitivity to light. A shingles outbreak usually lasts for two to six weeks. It's possible to have repeated outbreaks, but most people just have one.

Treatment

Quick treatment with antiviral drugs can help you heal faster. Medications can also help control your painful, itchy skin. Treatment can help make sure you don't have any complications. There's also a shingles vaccine that can help prevent outbreaks or lessen the symptoms. Your healthcare provider can create a plan that's right for you.