

# Managing Shingles

## What is shingles?

Shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is an uncomfortable and often painful rash. It usually appears in a well-defined area on the abdomen or buttocks, although it may also occur on the face or arms. Because it commonly extends around the middle of the body, herpes zoster gets its name from a Greek word meaning girdle. The name shingles comes from the Latin word *cingulum*, a translation of *zoster*, which also means girdle.

## What causes shingles?

Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. Shingles is one of a variety of skin infections caused by viruses in the herpes family.

## What is the relationship between chickenpox and shingles?

When children (or adults) first contract the varicella-zoster virus, they develop chickenpox. After the symptoms disappear, the virus “hibernates” in certain nerve cells within the body. During this period of hibernation, the virus causes no symptoms. Many people never have any further problems following this primary infection.

Unfortunately, the virus reactivates in some people, causing shingles, a skin outbreak that is different from chickenpox. Why some people get shingles and others do not is not fully understood.

## How serious is shingles?

In patients with normal immune systems, shingles rarely leads to hospitalization, usually clears up in a few weeks, and seldom recurs.

However, there is one complication that you should know about called postherpetic neuralgia, or PHN. People with PHN have pain that lasts for weeks, months, or even years after the skin outbreak has healed. Using medicine in the early stages of shingles may help reduce the duration of PHN.

## Is shingles contagious—can I give it to someone else?

When your blisters break and ooze, it is possible for you to spread the virus to people who have never had chickenpox or those whose immune system is not normal.

## What are VALTRESX® (valacyclovir HCl) Caplets?

VALTRESX is the brand name of valacyclovir, an anti-herpetic medication widely used in the treatment of shingles.\* VALTRESX helps stop the varicella-zoster virus from multiplying. This may speed healing and keep new blisters from forming. In a large clinical study, VALTRESX was compared to another leading shingles medicine (acyclovir) and stopped new blisters from forming in the same amount of time (3 days). In this study, people who were taking VALTRESX had a median duration of PHN that was 19 days shorter than it was for people taking acyclovir. However, this difference was not scientifically meaningful.



(valacyclovir HCl)  
500mg, 1g Caplets

For maximum effectiveness, VALTRESX should be used early in the course of shingles. Ideally, you should begin taking VALTRESX within the first 2 or 3 days of the rash.

## Important information about VALTRESX Caplets and shingles treatment

The usual dose of VALTRESX for herpes zoster is 1 gram (one 1-g tablet) taken 3 times a day for 7 days. Your doctor or other healthcare provider may adjust this dose if you have kidney problems. VALTRESX may be taken with or without food.

If your immune system is not normal because of advanced HIV disease or a bone marrow or kidney transplant, make sure your doctor knows this in order to avoid a potentially serious complication. VALTRESX is intended for adults with normal immune systems. Although VALTRESX may be taken with many different medications, be sure all your healthcare providers know about all prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements you are taking.

## Does VALTRESX cause side effects?

Like most medications, VALTRESX can cause side effects. The most common are nausea, headache, and vomiting. If you develop these or other health problems while taking VALTRESX, contact your doctor or other healthcare provider.

\*In adults with normal immune systems.

Please see accompanying Prescribing Information for VALTRESX.