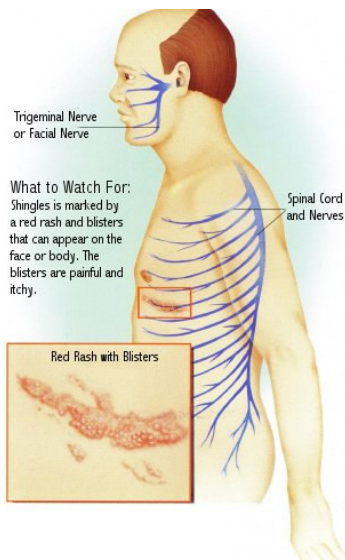


## What are Shingles?



The varicella-zoster virus is responsible for causing chickenpox and shingles. Both chickenpox and shingles (herpes zoster) are marked by an outbreak of rash or blisters on the skin.

People who have had chickenpox in the past are at risk for developing shingles because the virus remains inactive in certain nerve cells of the body and can become active later in life. You may be at risk for shingles if you:

- Have a weakened immune system (such as people with cancer or HIV)
- Are over the age of 50
- Have been ill
- Are under significant stress

Early symptoms of shingles include:

- Pain that is itching, stabbing, or shooting
- Tingling feeling in or under the skin, which is red in the affected area
- Fever, chills, and headache
- Stomach upset

After a few days, a rash appears as a band or a cluster of raised dots, usually on one side of the body. The rash can appear around the waistline or on one side of the face or the trunk. The rash eventually develops into red, fluid-filled, round, painful blisters. Usually, these blisters begin to dry out within a few days or weeks.

Doctors diagnose shingles based on the way the rash looks. The blisters of a shingles rash usually appear in a band on one side of the body. Shingles also may be diagnosed with the scraping or swab of the fluid from the blisters that can be analyzed in a lab.

There is no cure for shingles, but treatments for the condition can help ease the associated pain and discomfort. Treatments also can help the healing of blisters and rash.

Antiviral medications can ease discomfort and reduce the duration of symptoms. In most cases, it is recommended that antiviral drugs be started within 72 hours of the first sign of shingles.

Pain medications can also offer relief. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be effective in relieving mild pain. For more severe cases of pain, prescription NSAIDs or narcotic pain relievers may be necessary. In some cases, steroids can be prescribed to ease the discomfort, inflammation, pain, redness, and itching associated with shingles' rash and blisters.

**If you would like more information, please contact  
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