

Cold sore prevention

If you're someone who suffers from cold sores, you'll know just how irritating and inconvenient, not to say painful and unattractive they are. They are caused by a virus – herpes simplex – which can be caught through contact via people who have an active sore, or they can also be passed from mother to child during birth, particularly if the mother has an active sore. It's a mystery why some people seem to be immune from it and others suffer horribly.

You'll usually find that these nasty little sores pop up on the lips, or on other mucus membranes when your immune system is a bit low – say after a cold or a period of stress, or major sun exposure. There could also be triggers such as chocolate, almonds or other foods. There are pharmaceutical treatments, but if you want natural solutions, they are easily available. Drugs can work, but they do stress your liver.

Things you can easily do to limit their spread include dabbing your lips with tea tree oil or white vinegar at the first sign of outbreak. However, don't do that unless you can feel the sore starting, as it is very drying to the skin, and don't continue it after the scab forms in a day or two. If the cold sore is close to one of your eyes, that can be a serious matter, and a visit to your doctor is warranted. The sores are contagious, so washing your hands more often and avoiding touching the sores is important. Never touch the sore then rub your eyes with the same finger.

If you can feel a cold sore-like pain over a wider area of your body (always one side only) such as your face or chest for example, you should definitely seek medical treatment, as it could be shingles which is a herpes virus too. Quick action can save you a lot of pain as shingles is serious and long-lasting.

What can you do to prevent cold sores? Quite a bit, actually. Lysine is an amino acid, and eating lysine-rich foods such as meat and fish will help a bit, but it's easier to get lysine supplements. Combining lysine with a high quality vitamin C supplement and zinc is quite effective, as it will boost your immune system and stop the virus recurring if you already have the sores, or will prevent it if you take them when you have a cold. I've personally had great success with this strategy.

There are also some herbal creams which may help to inhibit the cold sores. But if your immune system is often low, perhaps a visit to your naturopath would be a good idea to assess your whole health status and look at this all in context. If you're getting the cold sores often, keep a diet diary so that your therapist can see if it's a food allergy that triggers these painful little sores.

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[Advice in these columns is of a general nature only, and not to be taken as specific treatment.]