

# IS IT POSSIBLE TO PREVENT THE CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF GENITAL HERPES SIMPLEX VIRUS INFECTIONS?

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## SUMMARY

The paper reports about genital herpes simplex virus (HSV) infections, especially recurrences of genital herpes and their pharmacological management. Some clinical studies with acyclovir and its important results for the management of genital herpes are reviewed.

## KEY WORDS

*genital HSV infections, pharmacological management, prevention, suppression*

## INTRODUCTION

The incidence of genital herpes simplex virus (HSV) infection is increasing (1), particularly in industrial developed countries. It is caused in 70 to 95% by herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2). It can also be caused by herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1). Clinical manifestations of genital HSV infection are divided into initial and recurrent episodes, which can be asymptomatic or symptomatic. The virus stays in the host for the whole life.

## PHARMACOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT OF GENITAL HSV INFECTIONS

The acyclic nucleoside analogue acyclovir with high affinity and selectivity for herpesviruses is a first-line therapy in the management of genital herpes (1). But it cannot eradicate the virus.

Recommended treatment for initial genital HSV infection is oral acyclovir 200 mg 5 times daily for 5 days and intravenous therapy for severe cases. A topical formulation is less effective. No preparation prevents the onset of recurrent episodes. Oral acyclovir is also recommended for recurrent genital herpes. Mild and rare episodes are treated episodically (episodic therapy). Patients with frequent (more than 6 attacks per year) and/or more severe recurrences and those who are very troubled by recurrences should be given continuous daily acyclovir (suppressive therapy) for several months to 1 year. After one year's therapy it is evaluated if suppressive therapy should be continued (Fig. 1).

Several studies have demonstrated that acyclovir significantly reduces the number of recurrent episodes of genital herpes compared with placebo (2, 3).

A study of 5 years of suppressive therapy with acyclovir found a progressive decrease in the frequency

