

Herpes Simplex Infection of the Eye

What is Herpes Simplex?

This is a common Viral infection of the eye. The virus responsible is called Herpes Simplex. It usually affects just one eye and is commoner in Men than women (Ratio 2:1).

How is it Caught?

Herpes Simplex affects us in two ways. Firstly most people have been infected with this virus as a child. It causes a mild illness with a few spots on the skin and most go unnoticed. It does not usually affect the eye very severely at this stage. In more severe cases like this Oral Acyclovir tablets or liquid hastens its resolution and is often prescribed. However the virus does not disappear completely and lies dormant in the Nerves.



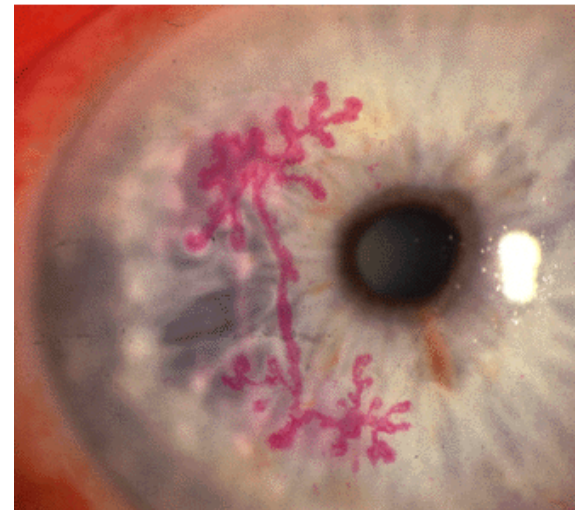
Later on in life, often associated with trauma, use of steroids, Menopause, the virus reactivates itself and you develop the Herpes Simplex ulcer of the eye. This time the eye is much more affected than before.

What are the Symptoms?

The first symptom is pain in the eye. Because it is a reactivation of the virus infection it almost always only affects one eye. The eye feels as though it has something in it. The eye is also usually inflamed and red.

What is the Treatment?

Fortunately for this virus we have a specific antiviral - Acyclovir eye Ointment. This is highly effective and is administered up to 5 times per day over a few weeks. Other treatments include debriding the surface skin.



Stromal disease

In some people the eye can become more inflamed and the use of steroids may also be needed. The superficial infection can then go deeper leading to some scarring which can affect the vision.

The infection usually takes a few weeks to settle.

Can it recur?

Unfortunately yes, 1/4 of people have a recurrence and if you have one recurrence half of those will have another within 2 years after that.

Can I prevent this?

Prompt treatment with Acyclovir or Ganciclovir will reduce the extent of the infection, you should take some with you if you travel abroad and resist anyone giving you ordinary antibiotic ointment/drops such as Chloramphenicol.

Nicholas Lee 3/4/2010



References from Practical Ophthalmology.