Genital Herpes

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted disease. This means that it is a disease passed by having sex with an infected person. There is no cure for genital herpes. The time between attacks can be months to years. The virus may live in a person but produce no problems *(symptoms*). This infection can be passed to a baby as it travels down the birth canal *(vagina)*. In a newborn, this can cause central nervous system damage, eye damage or even death. The virus that causes genital herpes is usually HSV-2 virus. The virus that causes oral herpes is usually HSV-1. The *diagnosis* (learning what is wrong) is made through culture results.

SYMPTOMS

Usually symptoms of pain and itching begin a couple days to a week after contact. It first appears as small blisters that progress to small painful ulcers which then scab over and heal after several days. It affects the outer genitalia, vagina, cervix, penis, anal area, buttocks and thighs.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Keep ulcerated areas dry and clean.
- Take medications as directed. Antiviral medications can speed up healing. They will not prevent recurrences or cure this infection. These medications can also be taken for suppression if there are frequent recurrences.
- **WARNING:** While the infection is active, it is contagious. Avoid all sexual contact during active infections.
- Condoms may help prevent spread of the herpes virus.
- **Practice safe sex.**
- Wash your hands thoroughly after touching the genital area.
- Avoid touching your eyes after touching your genital area.
- **Inform your caregiver if you have had genital herpes and become pregnant. It is your responsibility to insure a safe outcome for your baby in this pregnancy.**
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have a recurrence of this infection.
- You do not respond to medications and are not improving.
- You have new sources of pain or discharge that have changed from the original infection.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C).
- You develop abdominal pain.
- You develop eye pain or signs of eye infection.

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