



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Long-term use of anti viral drugs for recurrent herpes

Information for GP

There are now three drugs licensed for use in the long-term suppression of genital herpes - aciclovir (Zovirax) and the prodrugs famciclovir (Famvir) and valaciclovir (Valtrex). Patients with more than 6 attacks of herpes a year are candidates for suppressive treatment. Those with fewer attacks, but who seem very depressed by them, may also benefit.

We recommend the patient continues on suppressive treatment for 6 to 12 months, then has a break for a period of assessment to monitor the natural history of recurrences. The minimum period of assessment should include at least 2 recurrences since 1 recurrence is common after stopping suppressive treatment. If the rate of recurrence is still unacceptably high, the patient can then resume for further 6-12 month periods. Some patients stay on the treatment for years with no ill-effects, although regular breaks are advisable.

Occasional breakthrough attacks can occur while on treatment but these tend to be mild. There is no need to increase the dosage for the duration of an attack. However, if breakthrough attacks are severe or frequent, the total daily dose of drug should be increased.

Shorter courses of this suppressive treatment can be used to cover holidays or exams for those who are particularly anxious to avoid a recurrence but who would not need suppression long-term.

Treatment options

Aciclovir 200mg 4 x daily offers the best protection against recurrences. (6% of patients had a recurrence by 84 days¹).

Aciclovir 400mg twice daily is a good compromise between efficacy and compliance (13% of patients had a recurrence by 84 days¹).

Famciclovir 250mg twice daily seems slightly more effective than aciclovir 400mg bd² (higher bioavailability).

Valaciclovir 500mg once daily is more convenient but a little less effective (31% of patients had a recurrence by day 112, compared with 90% on placebo³). Probably 500mg bd is more effective.

Table 2. Relative costs of antiviral drugs for treating genital herpes.^a

Indication	Treatment	Aciclovir	Famciclovir	Valaciclovir
	duration			
First episode	5 days	£1.43	£94.57	£15.70
Recurrence	5 days	£1.43	£30.02	£15.70
Suppression	1 year	£69.48	£4602.41	£73.87

^aSource of costing DMG tariff BNF September 2013–March 2014. (Different prices may be negotiated by NHS hospital trusts).¹⁰⁶

Anogenital Herpes Guideline 2014, www.bashh.org

Our recommendations

First line treatment: Aciclovir 400 mg bd

Second line treatment: If twice daily aciclovir does not suppress attacks to the patients satisfaction try aciclovir 200mg qds

Third line treatment: Very occasionally, due to aciclovir's variable absorption, a pro-drug is necessary to suppress attacks successfully. Valaciclovir 500 bd is worth trying.

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1. Mindel A. Dosage and safety of long-term suppressive aciclovir therapy for recurrent genital herpes. Lancet 1988; 1 : 926-928
 2. Mertz G.J Oral famciclovir for suppression of recurrent genital herpes simplex virus infection in women. Arch Int Med 1997; 157 :343-349
 3. Patel R. Once-daily valaciclovir for suppression of recurrent genital herpes – the first placebo-controlled clinical trial. 1st European Congress of Chemotherapy, Glasgow 1996.

Follow-up

We are happy to review your patient in the Department of Sexual Health every 6-12 months; particularly if there are difficulties achieving adequate suppression.

Contraception (25s and under) & Sexual Health (all ages) Drop-in Clinics – no appointment needed

Department of Sexual Health
Florey and Contraceptive Services

21A Craven Road

Reading RG1 5LE

Tel: 0118 322 7202

www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/sexualhealth

www.safesex.berkshire.nhs.uk

Except for public holidays, the clinic is open:

Monday to Friday 7am – 7pm.

Saturday 9.30 am – 11.30 am.

The clinic is closed on Thursday between 8am – 9am for staff training.

Newbury Sexual Health
Clinic

West Berkshire Community
Hospital

Benham Hill

Thatcham RG18 3AS

9.30am – 11.30am on
Saturdays (excluding those
with a public holiday).



We will endeavour to see everyone. However, if between 6pm and 7pm attendance is high, we may ask you to return the next day.

Consistent use of condoms will reduce your risk of catching most STIs.

Dept. of Sexual Health, Mar 17

Review due: Mar 19