



Painful Abdominal Eruption

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A 42-year-old man presents with a painful eruption on his right abdomen in a linear distribution that has been present for three days. The patient is otherwise in good health.

1. What is the diagnosis?

- Herpes simplex
- Herpes zoster
- Chickenpox
- Dyshidrotic eczema

2. What are the treatment options?

- Oral valacyclovir
- Oral famciclovir
- Oral acyclovir
- Any of the above

Herpes zoster, also known as shingles, is caused by reactivation of endogenous, latent varicella-zoster virus that has taken up residence in a sensory dorsal root ganglion after primary infection. The onset of the disease may be heralded by pain within the dermatome, which precedes the lesions by 48 to 72 hours. An area of erythema might follow and precede the development of a group of vesicles in the distribution of the dermatome that corresponds to the infected dorsal root ganglion. Usually, one or, less commonly, two or three adjacent dermatomes are affected. The lesions are typically unilateral and are more common in the lower thoracic and upper lumbar dermatomes. Vesicles may coalesce to form bullous lesions. The vesicular and bullous lesions may become pustular or, occasionally, hemorrhagic; they ultimately crust in 7 to 10 days. In individuals with immunodeficiency, the lesions may involve multiple



contiguous, noncontiguous, bilateral, or unusual dermatomes. The lesions may disseminate to other organs, such as the liver, kidneys, lungs, and CNS. The illness is also more severe and prolonged. The most common complications are postherpetic neuralgia, secondary bacterial infection, postinflammatory depigmentation, and scarring.

The goals of antiviral therapy are to reduce viral shedding, hasten healing of cutaneous lesions, prevent new lesion formation, reduce the pain associated with acute neuritis, and, possibly, decrease complications from the disease. Oral valacyclovir, famciclovir, and acyclovir are acceptable options. Valacyclovir and famciclovir are generally preferred to acyclovir, because increased bioavailability results in a reduction in daily doses. 

Answers: 1-b; 2-d

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