



Cancer Q & A

with Kathy Kanavos

YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT CANCER

Dear Kathy,

After I had my hysterectomy, I came down with shingles. They were all over the left side of my body. I went to an acupuncturist for treatment and the shingles went away.

My questions are, what are shingles, why did I get them, will they come back and are there any symptoms signaling their return? And can I get them on another part of my body?

Also, are there any medications I can take if they do come back? I heard there is a shingles shot but that insurance will not pay for it (\$350.00) unless you are 65 years old.

Nancy in California

Dear Nancy,

I experienced shingles while taking chemotherapy and know what you went through. But adding shingles to surgery is truly adding insult to injury. I'm sorry you had to experience that but I'm glad the acupuncturist was able to help you get rid of them.

As for whether or not they will come back... unfortunately, only time will tell. Let me address your questions one at a time.

Shingles (herpes zoster virus) is an extremely painful viral infection of the nerve roots resulting in a skin rash caused by the same virus that causes the childhood illness chickenpox.

The reactivated virus responsible for these conditions is called Varicella Zoster Virus (VZV) If you've had chicken pox, you have a 10 to 20 percent chance of someday developing shingles. The risk increases with age: of the million cases that occur in the United States every year, about half are in people over 60.

Some investigators suggest that stress, fatigue, a weakening immune system that is either age related or disease related, or a drug-related immune suppressant such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy may participate in virus reactivation. I'm sure surgery, as in your case, could be added to that list.

Depending on the nerves involved, shingles can affect many parts of the body. The first symptom of shingles is often fatigue followed by extreme sensitivity or pain in a broad band on one side of the body. The sensation can be itching, tingling, burning, constant aching, or a deep, shooting, or "lightning bolt" pain.

Typically, one to three days after the pain starts, a rash with raised, red bumps and blisters erupts on the skin in the same distribution as the pain.

Antiviral medication is effective only if given early (24-72 hours after the rash develops). It can decrease the duration of the skin rash and pain.

These medications are available with a prescription.; Acyclover (Zovirex), Valacyclovir (Valtrex), and Femiciclovir (Femvir). Zostavax is a one-time booster shot to prevent shingles. Some insurance plans are now beginning to cover Zostavax.

A word of warning - do not scratch! This may increase the risk of secondary bacterial infection and scarring. Antihistamines and topical creams can relieve the itching, and pain medicine can make you more comfortable.

Keep the area clean with mild soap and water. Application of petroleum jelly can aid in healing. Wear loose clothing to avoid extra pain from clothing rubbing against the rash. Avoid close skin-to-skin contact with others who have not had chickenpox, are ill, or who have a weakened immune system.

Please email your questions to
kathykanavos@yahoo.com

Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos is a two-time, ten-year breast cancer survivor. She lives on Cape Cod with her husband of 25 years and their cats.

A retired special education teacher, Kathy also taught psychology at the University of South Florida, and is a Reiki master. She is a regular contributor to CWO and a mentor for WE CAN

For seven years, Kathy has been a phone counselor to women throughout the country & seven foreign countries for the R. A. Bloch Cancer

Foundation.<http://www.blochcancer.org> or email:hotline@blochcancer.org

She has penned a book, Surviving Cancerland: A Memoir on the Psychic Aspects of Healing, and recently signed with New York literary agent Jack Scovill to find a publisher for her work.

The Pink Pages of her book have been added to the R.A. BLOCH CANCER FOUNDATION reference booklet.

Kathy was featured in the Barnstable Patriot Newspaper and interviewed in January, 2009, for the PROFILE program of TV Channel 17.

Follow Kathy on her Blog
<http://kathleenokeefekanavos.blogspot.com> and on Twitter
<http://twitter.com/PsychicHealing>



Social Security Compassionate Allowances Initiative

In October 2008, the Social Security Administration (SSA) implemented a Compassionate Allowances initiative to expedite the processing of disability claims for severe and rare medical conditions. This process should allow SSA to make decisions on these cases in an average of 6 to 8 days, rather than months or years. About half of the initial list of 50 covered conditions are cancers. For a current list go to <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances/conditions.htm>