

Ask Leyla: Can certain foods trigger herpes outbreaks?

written by Leyla Muedin MS, RD, CDN | October 2, 2020



Q: I suffer from cold sores, and I've heard that certain foods can be a trigger for outbreaks—including nuts. I eat nuts daily as a snack; should I be avoiding them to prevent herpes outbreaks?

A: The herpes virus can reactivate in times of stress, a weakened immune system, or with sun and even wind exposure. If you are prone to herpes outbreaks, such as cold sores or fever blisters on the lips or face, or genital herpes, you would likely benefit from *avoiding* foods high in the amino acid arginine. Arginine is required for the herpes virus to replicate.

Reducing intake of these foods is also helpful for preventing shingles outbreaks, another herpes virus (herpes zoster – a reactivation of the varicella virus years after initial infection with chickenpox).

Arginine is found in many foods, but some of the highest amounts can be found in:

Nuts
Corn
Brussels sprouts
Chocolate
Gelatin

The amino acid lysine can help reduce the frequency of outbreaks and help heal an active infection. Taking daily lysine is also beneficial if you want to continue eating the high-arginine foods listed above. It's the ratio of lysine to arginine that's important—more lysine helps boost the body's defenses against infection by antagonizing arginine. A typical dose for prevention is 500 mg up to three times daily away from food. For active infection, at least 1,000 mg of lysine three times daily is appropriate.

Because sugar weakens immune response, it is best to avoid sweetened foods

and beverages such as cakes, cookies, juice drinks, and sodas as well as other refined carbohydrates such as white bread, pastas, potatoes, and white rice, which rapidly turn to sugar.

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To your health!

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