

Ask Leyla: Should I avoid certain foods during a shingles outbreak?

written by Leyla Muedin MS, RD, CDN | July 23, 2021



Q: What foods must I avoid when I have shingles and what do I have to do to hasten the resolution of this condition?

A: The herpes virus, in this case herpes zoster – a reactivation of the varicella virus years after initial infection with chickenpox, can reactivate in times of stress, infection, or a weakened immune system. If you are prone to shingles outbreaks, you would likely benefit from *avoiding* foods high in the amino acid, arginine. Arginine is required for the herpes virus to replicate.

Arginine is found in many foods, but some of the highest arginine-containing foods are:

- 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, consult with your health practitioner immediately.

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, pasta, potatoes, and white rice, which rapidly turn to sugar.

A clean diet, restful sleep, exercise, and reduced stress are critical in avoiding this condition or hastening its recovery.

To your health!

Leyla Muedin, MS, RD, CDN