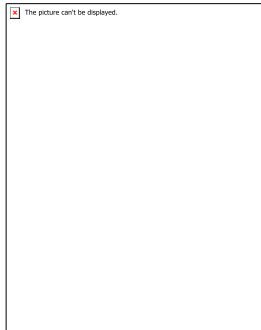


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Evidence Updated: None
Bottom Line: No change
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Simplicity for simplex (cold sores): a pill in the pocket takes the tingling away

Clinical Question: Do antivirals (oral or topical) or docosanol (Abreva®) improve healing time for patients with recurrent herpes labialis (cold sores)?

Bottom-line: One or two doses of famciclovir may improve cold sore healing by about 2 days, while valacyclovir and longer courses of topical acyclovir or docosanol (Abreva®) may improve healing by 0.5-1 day.

Evidence:

Placebo-controlled randomized controlled trials (RCT) of:

- Immunocompetent patients with recurrent cold sores (most ≥ 3 episodes/year).
- Starting treatment ≤ 1 hour of prodrome symptoms (unless specified).

Oral antivirals:

- Three larger RCTs:
 - Famciclovir: 1500mg x1 or 750mg BID x1 day (477 patients).¹
 - Valacyclovir: 1 day (2g BID) or 2 day (2g BID then 1g BID) (1856 patients).²
 - Acyclovir: 400mg 5 times/day x5 days (174 patients).³
- Healing time improvement:
 - Famciclovir: 2-2.5 days.
 - Valacyclovir: 0.5~1 day.
 - Acyclovir: not significant.

Topical acyclovir:

- RCT: acyclovir 5% cream 5 times/day x4 days (1341 patients).⁴
 - Healing time improved ~ 0.5 day.

Docosanol 10% (Abreva®):

- RCT: docosanol 5 times/day started < 12 hours of symptoms until healing occurred (743 patients).⁵
 - Healing time improved ~ 0.75 day.

Limitations:

- No direct comparisons of different oral agents.^{1,2}
- Many studies industry-supported^{1-4,5} and by same author.¹⁻⁴

Context:

- Antivirals generally help cold sores heal in 4-5 days versus 5-6 days.¹⁻⁴
- 35% of patients experience >4 recurrences per year.⁶
- Cost for treating one recurrence (using study dose regimens):
 - Oral antivirals: ~\$20 (valacyclovir 1 day) to \$44 (acyclovir 5 days).
 - Topical acyclovir (4g) ~\$40 or docosanol (2g) ~\$25.
- Health Canada has approved only valacyclovir for treating cold sores,⁷ while FDA has approved valacyclovir,⁸ famciclovir⁹ and acyclovir^{9,11} (oral and topical).

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