



Did you know that people who have had shingles (herpes zoster) before might continue to have burning pain, stabbing pain, or shooting pain even after the visible shingles have disappeared? Shingles (herpes zoster) are caused by an infection with the varicella zoster (chickenpox) virus, resulting in an inflammation of nerve cells. Shingles can be very painful and uncomfortable as such. But it is even worse if the pain continues after the visible shingles have disappeared. This pain after shingles is called **PHN**, or **postherpetic neuralgia**. Doctors often have a difficult time diagnosing postherpetic neuralgia so patients actively need to tell their doctor if they had a shingles infection in the past and now have chronic pain in the affected area.

## WHAT IS POSTHERPETIC NEURALGIA?

Postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) is a complication of **shingles**. Shingles is also called **herpes zoster**, so postherpetic neuralgia is **nerve pain** (neuralgia) after (post) herpes zoster (herpetic). Although most cases of shingles clear up within a few weeks, the pain can continue to last long after the visible shingles rash and blisters have disappeared, sometimes for months or even years. PHN can even appear after a period when there are no shingles any more.

## WHAT CAUSES POSTHERPETIC NEURALGIA?

Postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) is a type of neuropathic pain. It occurs if nerves are damaged due to a previous herpes zoster infection. Damaged nerves cannot correctly transmit signals from the skin to the brain. The result can be chronic pain that may persist for months or even years. Around 20% of patients suffering from shingles will develop PHN during their lifetime. The risk of PHN increases with age.

## WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL POSTHERPETIC NEURALGIA SYMPTOMS?

The signs and symptoms of postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) are very often limited or localized to the area of skin where the shingles outbreak first occurred, often in a band around the patient's trunk, usually on just one side of the body. This is why PHN is often referred to as being a type of **localized neuropathic pain (LNP)**. The chronic pain associated with PHN can be described as 'burning pain', 'stabbing pain', or 'shooting pain'. Patients with PHN often have hypersensitive skin and cannot bear even the touch of clothing on the affected skin, a condition doctors call **allodynia**. Although less common, some patients can experience itching, numbness or feelings of 'pins and needles'.

## WHAT CAN PATIENTS DO?

It is important to get active. With a correct diagnosis, early treatment might influence the course of postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) in a positive way. Do you have symptoms that you would describe as 'burning pain', 'shooting pain', or 'stabbing pain'? Do you have a very sensitive skin, e.g. is it painful for you to wear cloths in that area?

If you have chronic pain after shingles, and think that it might be PHN, please fill out the 'my pain questionnaire' on [www.mypainfeelslike.com](http://www.mypainfeelslike.com) and see your doctor at your earliest convenience. Be sure to tell your doctor that you had a shingles infection in the past and now have chronic pain in the affected area.