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Efficacy of oral antiviral prophylaxis in preventing ocular herpes simplex virus recurrences in patients with and without self-reported atopy

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Purpose: To compare the efficacy of oral antiviral prophylactic treatment for herpes simplex virus (HSV) recurrences in patients with and without self-reported atopy. **Design:** Retrospective cohort comparative study. **Methods:** Setting: Cornea Service, Wills Eye Hospital. Study population: Patients who presented with previously diagnosed ocular HSV between March 2003 and March 2004. From 244 patients invited, 54 patients (58 eyes) were included. One hundred and ninety patients were excluded according to exclusion criteria: No active episode during follow-up, immunosuppression, less than one year of follow-up, previous history of penetrating keratoplasty. **Exposure assessment:** Questionnaire regarding history of atopic disease, considering: presence of allergic rhinitis, asthma or atopic dermatitis, and chart review of ocular history. Main outcome measures: Incidence of all types of HSV recurrences with and without antiviral prophylaxis within each group and between groups. HSV episodes were classified into infectious, inflammatory and mixed for analysis. **Results:** Atopic/non-atopic (p value): Mean follow-up without prophylaxis 8.1 (± 8.2)/7.3 years (± 8.6) ($p=0.71$); mean follow-up with prophylaxis 2.9 (± 2.3)/2.6 years (± 2.2) ($p=0.51$); the effect of prophylaxis significantly reduced the all recurrences in both groups except in the inflammatory recurrences in the atopic group and in the mixed recurrences in both groups. Prophylaxis decreased infectious episodes by 44% in non-atopic and 76% in atopics and decreased inflammatory manifestations by 69% in the non-atopic group and 8% in the atopic group. **Conclusion:** Antiviral prophylaxis for HSV recurrences was more effective in reducing infections in atopics and less effective in reducing inflammatory episodes in atopics versus non-atopics.