# Patient-Centered Insights into the Burden and Impact of Herpes Zoster in Adults Aged 50–64 Years in the United States

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## Background & Aim

- Around **1 in 3** US adults born before 1980 will **develop HZ** during their **lifetime**.[1]
- The aim was to **describe the experience of US adults aged 50–64 years with recent HZ.**

## Conclusions

**Early HZ symptoms were commonly misattributed** (e.g. bite, allergy), reinforcing the need for earlier recognition and timely treatment.

**HZ was associated with a substantial day-to-day burden beyond pain**, including impacts on sleep, daily functioning, quality of life, and the ability to work.

These findings underscore **the importance of HZ education and prevention.**

## Study design

- Patients with newly diagnosed HZ were identified within the **Veradigm Network EHR.**
- **Inclusion criteria:**
  - Age 50–64 years
  - No immunocompromising conditions or medications
  - No prior HZ vaccination
  - No HZ diagnosis in the past year
- Patients were recruited for a survey study via a patient engagement platform.
  - A subset were enrolled during July–October 2025 and underwent 15–30-minute **semi-structured telephone interviews** with primary recruitment targeted 30–60 days after their HZ diagnosis.
- **Interviews were recorded, transcribed, summarized, and thematically analyzed.**

## Results – Demographics

- Of 23 patients, most were:
  - **Female** (15)
  - **White** (19)
  - **Non-Hispanic** (20)
  - **Educated beyond high school** (22)
  - **Married or living with a partner** (17)
  - **Working** (16), **mainly full-time** (14)
- Full details can be found in Table S1.
- Chronic conditions included:
  - Hyperlipidemia (12)
  - CVD (10)
  - Hypertension (8)
  - Depression (5)
  - Diabetes (3)
  - CKD/ESRD (2)
  - COPD (1)
  - Asthma (1)

## Results – Patient journey

### INITIAL CONFUSION ABOUT CONDITION

"I originally thought something was going on with my gallbladder or something. It felt more internal than external pain"

**Patient suspicions at symptom onset**

- **10** suspected an environmental reaction.
- **8 were unsure** what had caused their rash/blisters.
- **2** suspected a **drug allergy.**

"I just thought they were chigger bites or mosquito bites"

"What sent me to the doctor was pain. I thought that it was possibly just a pulled muscle"

"I thought I maybe had an interaction with a new medicine because it came out of nowhere"

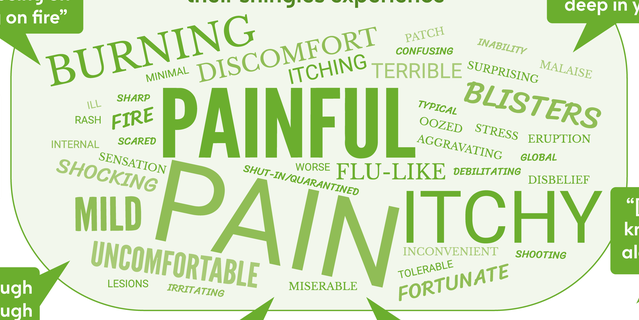
### DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

"I talked to one of my friends and she said 'OK, that's shingles'"

- **7** patients first suspected shingles based on the **comments/opinions of others.**
- Most patients sought **medical care within 4 days** and were **immediately diagnosed by a healthcare professional**, but 2 patients were initially misdiagnosed.
- All patients were prescribed **HZ medications*** and 9 also used **OTC creams.**

### HZ EXPERIENCES

**Words that best described their shingles experience**




"Closest thing to being on fire without being on fire"

"It's like getting poked by a bunch of needles when you're showering"

"I would rather go through childbirth than go through shingles again"

"Discomfort never left me"

"It itches down deep in your skin"

"I felt like I had bugs in my head"

"[It] felt like a knife scraping along my skin"

"It felt like I had a broken rib"

"I didn't realize it would be as painful and as annoyingly itchy as it was"

### IMPACT OF HZ

**IMPACT ON CHRONIC CONDITIONS**

"Felt like all my nerve problems got worse"

"Since I'm diabetic, it just threw me all out of the loop. I was just…I was lost"

"Tired but not able to sleep because you're just uncomfortable"

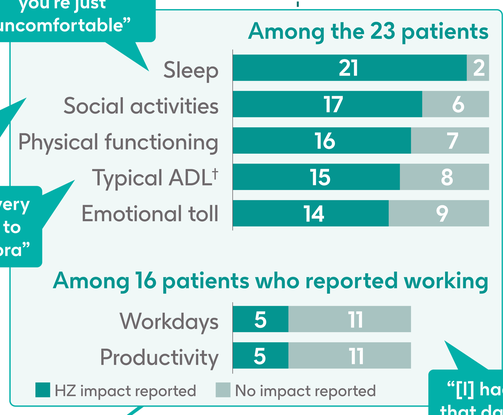
"I felt like I was bedridden because I was too tired to do anything"

"I didn't do anything extra that I didn't have to do"

"Took that next week off from work, had to stay home, and lost that money"

"It was very painful to wear a bra"

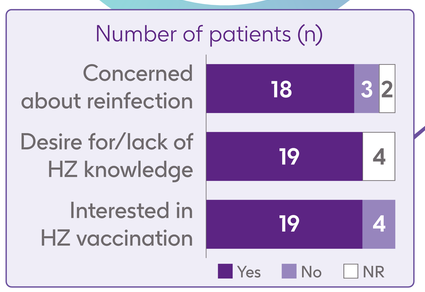
"[I] had to leave work that day because I was just in so much pain"




### FUTURE OUTLOOK

"A blessing in disguise because it forced me to think about other vaccines and I had not gotten the shingles vaccines, so I am kicking myself for that"

"I would rather have anything than to have that [shingles] again"




**Additional quotes can be found in Table S2.**

## Abbreviations

**ADL**, activities of daily living; **CKD**, chronic kidney disease; **COPD**, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; **CVD**, cardiovascular disease; **EHR**, electronic health record; **ESRD**, end-stage renal disease; **HZ**, herpes zoster; **NR**, not reported; **OTC**, over-the-counter; **US**, United States

*Including antivirals, gabapentin, oral corticosteroids, pain medications, capsaicin cream, other creams.
†Self-care, bathing/showering, chores, driving, eating, dressing, wearing clothes.

## Reference

1. https://www.cdc.gov/shingles/hcp/clinical-overview/index.html.

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Digital poster
Supplemental data

Narrated summary



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