

Warts and Verrucas

Warts are usually harmless, but may be unsightly. Warts on the feet are called verrucas and are sometimes painful. They are caused by a virus which causes a reaction in the skin. They usually clear in time without treatment. They are contagious but the risk of passing them on to others is low. You are more at risk of being infected if your skin is damaged or wet, and in contact with rough surfaces, for example, in swimming pools. Warts may spread round the nails, lips and surrounding skin if you bite or suck nails or warts on your fingers. To reduce the chance of passing on warts to others, don't share towels or socks, and when swimming cover a wart or verruca with a waterproof plaster.

There is no need to treat warts if they are not causing you any problems. Without treatment, most warts will have gone within 1-2 years, but often within 10 weeks. Warts in older people are sometimes more persistent and may last for several years. Treatment can clear warts more quickly. However, treatments are time-consuming and can be painful. In most cases, simply waiting for them to go is usually the best thing to do.

Salicylic acid

There are lotions, paints and special plasters that contain salicylic acid eg. Salactol. You can buy these at pharmacies. Read the instructions in the packet. Usually:

- You need to apply each day for up to three months. This acid burns off the top layer.
- Every few days rub off the dead tissue from the top of the wart, with emery paper or a pumice stone
- It is best if you soak the wart in water for 5-10 minutes before applying acid.
- If you have diabetes or poor circulation, you should use salicylic acid only on the advice of a doctor.

If you use the acid each day you have a good chance of clearing the warts within 3 months.

Freezing treatment (cryotherapy) has been a popular treatment. However the evidence now shows that this is less effective than salicylic acid, more expensive, more painful and more likely to cause long term problems such as scarring, tissue damage and loss of skin pigmentation so it is no longer used as a treatment for warts and verrucae at this practice apart from exceptional cases.

Tape: one research study found that covering a wart with duct tape seemed to give a good chance of clearing warts within a month or two. The method described in the study was:

- The wart was covered with duct tape for 6 days. If the tape fell off during this time, a fresh piece of tape was put on.
- After 6 days, the tape was removed and the wart soaked in warm water for 5 minutes. After drying, it was then gently rubbed with an emery board or pumice stone to get rid of dead tissue from the wart
- The wart was then left uncovered overnight and duct tape put on again the next day.
- Treatment was continued for up to two months.

Other treatment options: A **podiatrist** or **chiroprapist** can pare or rub down a verruca. This is often enough to ease any pain, even though part of the verruca may still remain.

If the above treatment options do not clear warts then other methods may be tried. There are various ways that can cut out or burn warts, but they are usually only done by specialists if other treatments have failed. Some treatments (such as laser treatment) are not available on the NHS to treat warts and verrucas.

Adapted from www.patient.co.uk