

Patient Information Leaflet

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Warts and Verrucae

For further information visit

www.nhs.uk or www.patient.co.uk

Warts are usually harmless, but may be unsightly. Warts on the feet are called verrucae and are sometimes painful. Warts and verrucae usually clear in time without treatment. Occasionally it can be worth offering treatment to clear persistent areas. For example, by applying salicylic acid or by covering with tape.

THERE IS NO NEED TO TREAT WARTS IF THEY ARE NOT CAUSING YOU ANY PROBLEMS

Without treatment, about 3 in 10 warts have gone within 10 weeks, and most warts will have gone within 1-2 years, and leave no scar. The chance that a wart will go is greatest in children and young people. Sometimes warts last longer. In particular, warts in older people are sometimes more persistent and may last for several years.

Treatment can often clear warts more quickly. However, treatments are time consuming and some can be painful. Parents often want treatment for their children, but children are often not bothered by warts. In most cases, simply waiting for them to go is usually the best thing to do.

The two most commonly used treatments are:

- ◆ Salicylic acid
- ◆ Covering with duct tape

These treatments cause an irritation which causes the body's immune system to recognise the virus and destroy this over time.

SALICYLIC ACID

There are various lotions, paints, and special plasters that contain salicylic acid; you can buy these at pharmacies. Read the instructions in the packet on how to use the brand you, or ask your pharmacist for advice. If you put the acid on correctly each day you have a good chance of clearing the warts within three months. Studies report that about 7-8 in 10 warts are cleared within three months with daily use of salicylic acid. 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 similar). Gradually the wart is 'burnt off' and 'rubbed away'
- ◆ It is best if you soak the wart in water for 5-10 minutes before applying acid
- ◆ You should not apply acid to the face because of the risk of skin irritation which may cause scarring
- ◆ If you have diabetes or poor circulation, you should use salicylic acid only on the advice of a doctor

TIPS FOR SUCCESS INCLUDE:

- ◆ Try not to get the acid on the skin next to the wart as it may become irritated. You can protect the nearby skin by putting some Vaseline on the normal skin beforehand, or by putting on a plaster with a hole in it which just exposes the wart for treatment.
- ◆ If the surrounding skin does become sore, stop the treatment for a few days until it settles. Then re-start treatment. There is also a small risk that you may get a skin allergy to the treatment. If this occurs, the surrounding skin becomes red and itchy.
- ◆ Acid lotions and paints are flammable. Keep them away from open fires and flames.

COVERING WITH DUCT TAPE

A recent study found that covering a wart with strong adhesive tape is likely to clear the wart within a month or two. (Duct tape was used in the study.) In this study, about 7 in 10 warts had cleared within two months with using duct tape. It may be worth a try as it is painless. The method described in the study was:

- ◆ The wart was covered with duct tape for six days. If the tape fell off during this time a fresh piece of tape was put on.
- ◆ After six days, the tape was removed and the wart soaked in warm water for five minutes. After drying it was then gently rubbed with an emery board or pumice stone to get rid of dead tissue from the top of 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. (Note: most warts that cleared with duct tape did so within 28 days.)

Some experts advise that you should not use duct tape on the face as in some people it can irritate the skin.

OTHER TREATMENT OPTIONS

A podiatrist or chiropodist 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 carried out if other treatments have failed. Some treatments (such as laser treatment) are not available on the NHS to treat warts and verrucae.

WHAT ABOUT SWIMMING?

A child with warts or verrucae should go swimming as normal. Warts can be covered with waterproof plasters; some people prefer to wear a special sock to cover verrucae which you can buy from pharmacies. It is also a good idea to wear flip-flops when using communal showers as this may reduce the chance of catching or passing on virus particles from verrucae.

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