

## **Warts and Veruccas**

Warts and Veruccas are small rough lumps on the skin. They are caused by a virus (human papilloma virus) which causes a reaction in the skin. Warts can occur anywhere on the body but occur most commonly on hands and feet. They range in size from 1mm to over 1cm. Sometimes only one or two warts develop. Sometimes several occur in the same area of skin. The shape and size of warts vary, and they are sometimes classed by how they look. For example: 'common warts', 'plane (flat) warts', 'filiform (finger-like) warts', 'mosaic warts', etc.

Warts are usually harmless, but may be unsightly. Warts on the feet are called verrucas. Warts and verrucas usually clear in time without treatment. If required, they can often be cleared more quickly with treatment. For example, by applying salicylic acid,

Note: anal and genital warts are different and best treated by the genito-urinary specialists

Most people develop one or more warts at some time in their life, usually before the age of 20. About 1 in 10 people in the UK have warts at any one time. They are not usually harmful. Sometimes verrucas are painful if they press on a sensitive part of the foot.

### **Are warts contagious?**

Yes, but the risk of passing them on to others is low. You need close skin-to-skin contact. You are more at risk of being infected if your skin is damaged, or if it is wet and macerated, and in contact with roughened surfaces. For example, in swimming pools and communal washing areas.

You can also spread the wart virus to other areas of your body. For example, warts may spread round the nails, lips, and surrounding skin if you bite warts on your fingers, or nearby nails, or if you suck fingers with warts on. If you have a poor immune system you may develop lots of warts which are difficult to clear. (For example, if you have AIDS, if you are on chemotherapy, etc.)

*To reduce the chance of passing on warts to others:*

- Don't share towels.
- When swimming, cover any wart or verruca with a waterproof plaster.
- If you have a verruca, wear flip flops in communal shower rooms and don't share shoes or socks.

*To reduce the chance of warts spreading to other areas of your body:*

- Don't scratch warts.
- Don't bite nails or suck fingers that have warts.
- If you have a verruca, change your socks daily.

### **To treat or not to treat?**

**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 resolve 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.

## **What are the treatment options?**

### **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 buy, ask your pharmacist for advice.

You need to apply salicylic acid 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'

Treatment may work better if you put a plaster on the wart after applying the acid

If the surrounding skin does become sore, stop the treatment for a few days until it settles. Then re-start treatment.

***The commonest cause for failure is failure to apply the treatment daily, or not applying enough treatment at each application.***

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### **Freezing treatment**

Liquid nitrogen and other agents are commonly used, but needs repeated applications. The nitrogen is sprayed on the wart. Liquid nitrogen is very cold, the freezing destroys the wart tissue. Freezing is not suitable for children under 15 years, it merely distresses them, and works no better than diligently painting the lesions with salicylic acid.