
SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON WARTS AND VERRUCAE



Warts are lumps on the skin that are caused by group of viruses called 'papilloma viruses'. They are very common, and most people will have had one or more at some point in their lives.

Verrucae are just warts found on the sole of the foot. They can be painful depending on where they are as well as being unsightly.

Even with no treatment nearly all warts and verrucae will go away with time as the body develops an immunity to the virus and clears the problem up naturally. This usually takes many months, and most will go away after a year or two (90% of warts in children within 2 years). There is a very small number of unlucky people who still have persistent warts even after this length of time!

Diagnosis

- Most warts are easy to diagnose based on their typical appearance, however, if diagnosis uncertain your podiatrist or GP may pare down until pinpoint bleeding of exposed capillary loops is seen.
- Differential diagnosis includes other keratotic lesions on the hands and feet
 - e.g. actinic keratosis, knuckle pads, SCC or focal palmoplantar keratoderma
 - On the feet differential includes corns, calluses or callosities; paring will be helpful
- Warts may be the presenting feature in people whose immune systems are not working properly, so prolonged, or multiple large warts should prompt consideration of underlying immune deficit and appropriate screening. Treatment of warts in this group is unlikely to be curative but may reduce size.

Treatment of Warts and Verrucae

No treatments are completely effective but most warts fortunately disappear without any treatment over time. The two main ways of managing warts or verrucae both work by sealing the lesion for long periods with *Duct tape* or with *wart paints*. Both these methods work by destroying the hard skin over the wart and then the virus underneath which is deep in the skin. Other treatments include *Cryotherapy* and *oral zinc*.

Duct Tape

This amazingly simple method has recently been tested in clinical trials and found to be the most effective method we know.

You need to buy some duct tape - just the regular stuff you find in hardware stores. Any brand will do as long as it is tough and waterproof.

Seal the wart or verruca under a piece of tape large enough to completely cover it and stay on securely and leave it on for 4-7 days. Keep dry when bathing and wear a sock in bed. Then take off the tape and the wart should have gone soft and flaky. Soak it in warm water and scrub off the dead skin as hard as possible. Then re-apply another piece of tape and repeat again.

The success rates are reported as 85% cure after 1 month, though some may take up to 2-3 months. It is important you keep up the treatment throughout that time, intermittently using duct tape will not work.

Wart paints

These contain glutaraldehyde or salicylic acid and burn through the layers of thickened skin. They are not painful to use because the hard skin on the verruca is dead. They need to be used every night (ideally) and it may take 3-6 months before the wart disappears.

They can be bought from all chemists without a prescription. Some recommended brands are:

- Glutarol
- Salactol
- Duofilm
- Bazuka
- Verrugon

If you struggle to afford these there is some evidence that painting on nail varnish may also be as effective.

After a bath or shower when the skin is soft, rub the wart/verruca with an emery board or pumice stone to get rid of as much hard skin as possible. Special files can be bought from some chemists and the *Scholl* shoe shop.

Apply the paint over the surface of the wart taking care not to get it on the surrounding skin which may get irritated by the liquid. You can put Vaseline on the normal skin first to protect it. Leave the paint on overnight and then rub the dead skin off in the morning. Do not use salicylic acid on the face.

Repeat this process daily or as often as you can.

It may take a few months to get rid of the wart or verruca, but unfortunately there are no short cuts- *persistence is the key to success!*

Freezing (cryotherapy)

This treatment is where the wart is frozen with a spray of liquid nitrogen. This causes a freezing 'burn' which is supposed to work by destroying the wart and skin tissue.

Despite popular opinion this isn't a particularly good treatment at all for warts and verrucae. Research shows that after 12 treatments cure rates are only about 50% (much less than for using paints or duct tape). It is sometimes recommended for filiform facial warts causing distress.

Along with many other GP practices and on the advice of the dermatologists in Gloucestershire we have stopped using liquid nitrogen to treat warts and verrucae as there is no evidence it works better than duct tape or wart paint.

Oral Zinc

Several studies have shown that a simple supplement with oral zinc can improve and clear warts. These are safe, effective and should cause no side effects. They are particularly useful in people who have been resistant to other treatments.

Zinc tablets can be bought from most pharmacies without a prescription. We would recommend at least a 3-month trial, but they can be continued long term.

A suitable dose in adults would be 15-45mg daily and in children less than 30kg, 5-30mg daily. Oral zinc comes in tablet, effervescent tablets (which dissolve in water) or jelly chews.

Useful contacts & further information

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/
- British Association of Dermatologists leaflets-
<https://cdn.bad.org.uk/uploads/2022/02/29200023/Viral-Warts-PIL-Aug-2021.pdf>
<https://cdn.bad.org.uk/uploads/2021/12/20153807/Plantar-warts-Update-Jun-2022-Lay-Review-Jun-2022-FINAL.pdf>

If you have further questions:

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184* or *01285 653122*

If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an **emergency** call **999**