



WARTS

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Warts are simply areas of skin that grow faster than normal due to the presence of the wart virus. Warts are skin-colored and feel rough to the touch. The technical name is verruca vulgaris. They are most common on the hands, feet and face but they can grow almost anywhere in the body. They are infectious and some people, especially children, are more susceptible than others.

Flat warts are much smaller and are less rough than hand or foot warts. They tend to grow in great numbers -- 20 to 100 at any one time. They can occur anywhere, but in children they are most common on the face. In adults they are most often found in the beard area in men and on the legs in women. Skin irritation from shaving probably accounts for this.

A plantar wart is simply a wart growing on the weight-bearing surface of the foot that grows inward rather than outwards because it is pressed on when a person walks.

As warts are caused by a virus infection, the body will build up resistance over a period of time and eventually the body will cause the warts to disappear. This may take months or sometimes years but is the natural way the body deals with warts. If they are allowed to disappear in this way it is less likely that a person will get any further ones as one will then be immune to that virus.

The first treatment to try on wart is removal with a salicylic acid liquid or pad. Be patient as it takes up to 12 weeks to get rid of warts. One will need a bottle of wart medication like Occlusal-HP or Compound W, a roll of 1-inch surgical tape ('Micropore' or 'Blenderm' are good) and a pumice stone or emery board. The wart should be soaked in warm water for 10 or 15 minutes. After soaking, rub away at the white, dead warty skin with the pumice stone. Apply the wart medication to the warts, getting as little as possible onto the surrounding skin and let dry. Put a piece of tape over the wart big enough to stop the medication getting rubbed off.

One needs to keep going down until just below the level of the surrounding skin to eradicate a wart completely. Stop when the base of the wart looks exactly like normal skin (i.e. no black dots or 'graininess'). If they become sore or bleed a little just leave off the treatment and carry on the following night. Special precautions are not needed if one goes swimming or walks barefoot to avoid infecting other people. The risk to others is very little.

Liquid nitrogen **cryotherapy** is what dermatologists use most often to cure warts. This method can cause pain, soreness and blistering and usually cures 50% of warts after one treatment. Frequent applications of liquid nitrogen are needed to cure more stubborn warts.

OTHER TREATMENTS

Warts around the fingers and nails are definitely a challenge. For finger and toe warts there is a very good, but unusual treatment using 'duct tape'. Apply the tape over the warts for 6 1/2 days per week and give the finger 1/2 day off per week. In kids, the tape often has to be replaced every day, or every other day, etc. The tape needs to be 'occlusive'; it cannot be tape that 'breathes' like in cloth Band-Aids, etc. The tape probably works for two reasons. Warts are viruses, and thus susceptible to changes in temperature and decreased oxygen locally. The occlusive tape probably locally increases temperature. There is often a foul odor when the tape is removed.

There are special treatments such as contact hypersensitization and Bleomycin injections used for difficult warts that really need to be gone. These often work, but may have some side effects that must be understood before they are tried. Tagamet is an oral medication used for ulcers that may help boost the immune response. It is only effective in children, and not consistently so.

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Burning warts off with a CO2 **laser** or electric needle is often effective, but scars. The CO2 laser is no better than burning with the needle. This can be used on one or two warts in difficult places. A more effective laser is the Pulsed dye laser, but this is not the laser most doctors have. The good thing about this laser is there is absolutely no downtime from pain, and scarring is rare. It is 60-75% effective (within 1-3 treatments spaced two weeks apart) for difficult warts.

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