

## Treating Warts

### **What are warts?**

Warts are common harmless skin growths caused by a virus. Warts can grow on any skin surface and are most commonly found on the hands. The appearance depends upon the location. On the tops of the hands and face they protrude, while on pressure areas such as palms and soles they are pushed inward. Warts do not, as many people think, have “roots”. The dark dots sometimes seen in warts are actually the ends of tiny blood vessels.

### **Do warts ever go away without treatment?**

Many warts will disappear spontaneously within 2 or 3 years of showing up. For this reason, and because all forms of treatment cause some discomfort, we often recommend not treating warts on young children.

### **How are warts treated?**

There are several ways to treat warts. All treatments cause some amount of irritation and none is guaranteed to cure a wart. Treatment depends upon many factors including size, location, and the number of warts.

- Liquid nitrogen is a very cold liquid that is put on the wart by a doctor or nurse. A blister may develop within a few hours after the treatment. This may be filled with a clear or dark fluid.
- Salicylic acid is the ingredients in medications such as Maximum Strength Wart Remover and Mediplast. These are available without a prescription. The medications come with directions. The acid will turn the top of the warts white. It is very important to scrub away the dead skin on the top of the wart a few times each week using an emery board, pumice stone, or washcloth. The dead skin will be softer and easier to remove if it is first soaked with warm water for about 10 minutes. It may take several months for the wart to disappear. The material used to scrub the wart such as the emery board will contain many wart particles on it after it is used. These may spread warts to other areas so it's best to use disposable emery boards that can be thrown away after each use.
- Cantharone is a liquid that we apply to the wart in clinic. It will cause a blister usually beginning the night of treatment. After application adults should rinse the area 6 hours after the treatment and children younger than 5 should wash the area in 4 hours.
- Squaric acid. Squaric acid is a medicine that will help teach your immune system how to attack the wart. To begin therapy we apply a concentrated version of the squaric acid in the office. You will be given a prescription for a weaker concentration of squaric acid that you will apply to the warts at home daily using a Q-tip. It may take several months for the warts go away.

- Tazorac. This is a retinoic acid derivative that is applied to the wart 1-2x per day. It will help your body destroy the wart. You should cover it with a bandaid after application.
- Aldara- This stimulates your immune system to fight the virus that is causing the wart.
- Bleomycin. This is a medication that is injected directly into the wart. It kills the cells that contain the wart. It may take several treatments, once per month, to destroy the wart.

### **How can I prevent warts?**

At present there is no vaccine or other way to prevent warts. Warts are spread because dead skin cells from the warts fall off and go to other places on your skin or other people's skin. There they can start a new infection. Picking or scratching or chewing the warts may help to spread. Also if you know somebody with warts you should not share towels or other materials that may pick up dead skin cells from the wart and then spread them to your skin.

### **How do I prevent warts from spreading?**

Avoid sharing towels, shoes or other items that may pick up contagious material and spread it. Avoid activities that involve intense skin contact with another person on the infected areas such as wrestling. Avoid picking/chewing or otherwise touching the lesions excessively.

### **How to treat blisters:**

It is best to leave the blister alone and allow it to dry. If the blister is painful you may pop it. To do that, first sterilize a needle by cleaning it with rubbing alcohol. Then prick the blister with the needle. After popping the blister, or if it breaks on it's own, gently clean the area with water and apply a thin layer of antibiotic ointment or Vaseline, then cover it with a bandage. Wash the area daily, then cover antibiotic ointment or Vaseline, then apply a bandage for the first 3-4 days.

3-4 days after the visit start the topical treatments that you were advised to use, such as salicylic acid, tazorac, or imiquimod.