

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Can Duct Tape Really Kill Warts?

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Plain Language Summary:

Home remedies exist for a lot of non-serious medical problems. Blow drying your ears to prevent wax build-up and face exercises for helping with migraines are just a couple of examples. There are a lot more. Some of these things actually work, while others are completely worthless. One home remedy that people have been trying for years is putting duct tape on warts as a way to kill them.

Warts are usually rough, hard, round, raised lumps on the skin that are usually whitish in color. They arise when the skin cells in that area get infected with a virus called HPV. They usually happen on the hands and feet, but can occur almost anywhere on the body. They are not cancer, but they can be contagious. If someone touches a wart, they are at a slightly increased risk of getting a wart themselves. Warts usually don't cause pain unless you put pressure on them or try to move them side to side. It is also not necessary to remove them either. In kids, warts can go away after about two years on average. In adults, they may go away, or they may stay around for many years. If you want a wart removed, there are a variety of options that your doctor can offer. Freezing the wart with liquid nitrogen or putting an acid solution on the wart are generally tried first. These treatments need to be done at the doctor, and more than one treatment may be needed to kill the wart. Therefore, this can be somewhat expensive. The treatments may also cause a minimal amount of pain during the treatment. The above reasons are why people, including doctors, are so interested in the duct tape treatment. Duct tape would be cheap, painless, and not require a visit to the doctor.

Many ideas have been put out there about how duct tape might work. Some people thought the duct tape suffocated the wart. Some thought it stimulated the immune system into killing the wart. Others believed that the duct tape stuck to the wart and pulled pieces of the wart off over time. Some people have even suggested duct tape works through psychological means. Despite these numerous ideas, scientists and doctors weren't interested in them yet. First they had to see if duct tape actually worked at all.

Clinical experiments were done in the late 1970s, late 1990s, and early 2000s to try to get an answer. Three small studies showed promising results, and it appeared duct tape actually worked. Each study had flaws, however, and this made the data hard to interpret. In 2007, a big, rigorous study was done in Minneapolis, MN to get an answer once and for all. In this study, they found no difference in wart healing when duct tape was used. This latest study was the most well-done, and carries more weight than the previous studies. Since this is an area of controversy, more studies will most likely be conducted in the future.

As for now, it appears that duct tape is **not** an effective treatment for warts. If you want a wart removed, going to the doctor's office is still the most reliable option. You could feel free to try duct tape, as there are very few risks. Do not try duct tape if you are allergic to tape or certain adhesives. Make sure to stop using duct tape if the area around the duct tape becomes swollen or begins to get irritated. For more resources on warts and their treatment, see below.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001888/>

http://www.medicinenet.com/warts_common_warts/article.htm

[www.medicinenet.com](http://www.medicinenet.com/warts_common_warts/article.htm) search: “warts”

www.webmd.com search: “warts.”

Key Words:

warts, duct tape

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