Title: The Common Wart: treatment methods

Author: Matthew Penning

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Abstract: The common wart is a problem that affects many people, most of whom are between the ages of 12 and 16. Three fourths of warts will disappear within two years, but most people want to get rid of them as soon as possible because warts are socially unacceptable. Two common ways to get rid of a wart are by freezing it off (cryotherapy) or using a weak liquid acid brushed on the top. Each treatment method has its pros and cons, but there is no scientific proof that either way of getting rid of a wart is better than other. Since neither way is better than the other, patients are able to pick which one they would prefer without getting a less effective treatment.

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The Common Wart: treatment methods

• What causes the common wart?

The common wart is caused by the Human Papilomavirus (HPV) infecting skin cells on the surface of the body, mostly on the hands and feet. This infection causes the skin cells to divide more than usual, which forms the bump in the skin. Warts usually come from a cut or open spot in the skin coming into contact with a surface that has the human papilomavirus on it.

• Why do people want warts removed?

In general, having a wart in a visible place, like the hands or on the face, is not socially acceptable, and having them on the feet can be very painful. Because of issues like these many people want warts removed as soon as possible and try many different things to get rid of warts.

• What is the best way to get rid of a wart?

Research has been done to determine what is the best treatment for permanent removal/remission of common warts, but no clear conclusion has been made as of yet. Since there is no one best treatment, people choose different treatment methods for different reasons: low cost, not time intensive, less pain, preference for doctor to perform the treatment.

• Where can I find more information on wart treatment?

Below is a short list of pros and cons for selected wart treatments. If you would like more information there are tables at the end of the leaflet, or you can access the papers cited in this leaflet over the internet by searching for the title of the paper with any search engine.
Cryotherapy: treatment method where the wart is frozen with an extremely cold substance, usually liquid nitrogen. Freezing techniques vary from physician to physician, but in general the treatment uses a 10 second freeze with a 2 mm white ring forming around the wart. Treatments are usually once every two weeks, for up to three months, until the wart is gone.

**Pros:** easy, not much patient time commitment, accessible.

**Cons:** painful, can be expensive (hundreds of dollars if done at the doctor’s office, around $25 for 10 treatments of one wart if done with OTC cryotherapy), possible blistering and/or scarring.

Topical Acid Treatment: treatment using a topical acid solution applied to the wart (concentrations of acid in the solution will vary, with weaker concentrations in OTC preparations and stronger concentrations in prescription preparations). Before each acid treatment the wart needs to be prepped. First soak the wart in warm water for 5 minutes, then removal the dead tissue (which is the bump made by the wart) with something like an emery board. The acid can then be applied to the wart and the area covered with a bandage. This process needs to be repeated every day or two until the wart is gone.

**Pros:** Cheap ($5-7 for a bottle of OTC acid solution), not very painful, less chance of blistering and/or scarring.

**Cons:** Not very convenient/requires dedication by the patient.

Duct Tape: treatment by applying a piece of duct tape a little bigger than the wart over the top of the wart and removing it six days later. After removing the tape the wart is soaked in water and then scrubbed with something rough (like an emery board or pumice stone) to remove the dead skin. The wart is left open to air overnight, and then the whole process is started again the next morning and continued for up to 2 months. There has been pretty good success with this treatment.

**Pros:** Cheap and painless.

**Cons:** Not very convenient/requires dedication by the patient.
Do nothing: One fifth of warts resolve, without treatment, within two months, one third within three months, and three fourths within two years.

Pros: Cheap, easy, and painless (unless the wart causes the patient pain)

Cons: social stigma for having a wart in a visible place, the wart can be painful, visually unappealing.

Information for this patient information leaflet was taken from multiple sources, including:


For more information on other treatment methods you can reference the article Cutaneous warts: an evidence-based approach to therapy which can be found in the August 2005 issue of American Family Physician magazine (Vol. 72, Issue 4, Pages 647-652). This article has two great tables that have a more in depth explanation of treatment options, cost, treatment process, and pros and cons to each; the article is accessible for free on the internet.