

Title: Cutaneous warts: to freeze or not to freeze?

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Plain Language Summary:

Warts are a common skin disease. They are caused by an infection of the skin with a human papilloma virus (HPV). Warts can occur anywhere on the skin, but they most often found on hands and feet. Warts are usually not harmful and most people do not notice them. These warts are not contagious. But some warts can be painful and unattractive.

It is not necessary to treat cutaneous warts if they are not bothersome. More than half of them will disappear in two years without treatment on their own. But some people want to treat warts because of discomfort, pain or the way they look.

Different types of treatment for warts exist. The most effective way is to use wart gels that contain salicylic acid. These gels are cheap and sold in many drug stores. They do not require a prescription. Salicylic acid gels are easy to use and they are not painful. But these gels do take a long time to work and have to be used for several weeks before the warts disappear. Another common way to treat warts is to have a doctor or a nurse freeze them with liquid nitrogen. This requires an office visit for a short and easy procedure called “cryotherapy”. However, freezing warts can be painful and frozen skin can blister. Sometimes more than one office visit may be needed to completely treat the wart. Right now there is not enough evidence to suggest that freezing warts is more effective than using gels with salicylic acid. More research is needed.

If you have a wart, you need to decide if you want to treat it or wait for it to disappear on its own. If you decide to treat it, you can discuss different options with your doctor to decide what you want to do.

Additional Resources:

WebMD

<http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/guide/warts>

MedlinePlus

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/warts.html

Key Words:

Warts, treatment, cryotherapy, liquid nitrogen, salicylic acid, HPV

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