

Warts

Warts are a nuisance. These common skin growths are caused by a virus, which is why they often spread or appear in clusters. Warts develop most often on the hands and soles of the feet, but they can occur anywhere on the body. Picking at them may make them spread. Warts themselves are not painful, but because of their thick skin, they may press into sensitive layers if on the foot and cause pain while walking. Before and after treatment for warts on the bottom of the foot, it may be helpful to place a Dr Scholl's moleskin pad in the shape of a small donut around the wart to take the pressure off the sensitive skin in the deeper layers.

Sometimes warts go away without any treatment at all. That is why some strange remedies have been claimed to cure warts; when such a remedy is applied just before a wart goes away, it gets the credit even though the treatment had no effect on the wart whatsoever. Various remedies can be used to remove warts. The kind of treatment depends on the type, size, thickness, number, and location of the warts and on whether they have been treated before and if so, how.

Generally, if there are many warts, or they are in a complicated location such as on the fingernail, we will refer to a dermatologist for treatment, or a podiatrist if the warts are only on the feet. If only one or two warts are present, we can usually shave the wart slightly and then treat with freezing the wart in the office. The following treatment methods can be used:

- Cryosurgery or freezing, with liquid nitrogen or Histofreezer is one method of treating small, uncomplicated warts. Healing is usually complete within three weeks, although repeated treatments may be needed. After the wart is removed—by this or any method—the treated area should be kept clean to avoid infection.
- Local application of an acid usually requires repeated treatments over several weeks. Various chemical agents can be used, singly or in combination. These products used to require a prescription, but are now widely available OTC, such as DuoFilm and MediPlast.
- The newest therapy around is, believe it or not, duct tape. In one study, duct tape was placed over warts for six days, and then removed overnight. The wart was cleaned and scraped gently with a pumice stone or emery board. The next day duct tape was reapplied and the process was repeated until the wart came off - usually in less than two months. It appeared to be safe and relatively pain-free. The study was done on young people at a pediatric and adolescent clinic, but there is no indication that it should not work with older adults, also. The duct tape apparently irritates the wart and causes an immune system reaction that leads to the eventual removal of the wart.
- There are a few reports that Tagamet, a non-prescription, anti-heartburn medicine can be taken for two months with good results in about 50% elimination of warts. This is not FDA approved, and we have no idea why it should work, but in some people it seems to.

Sometimes wart remedies work and sometimes they don't. If some of the virus remains in the body more warts may pop out.

Isn't there any surefire treatment for warts? Not yet. The real solution will probably come in the form of some kind of antiviral medication or perhaps a vaccine to protect against the wart virus. However, such products are probably always in the future.