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WARTS
by
Herb Goodheart, M.D.

What are warts?

- Warts are skin growths caused by a viral infection in the outer layer of skin.
- Warts are very common, particularly in children.
- An estimated 20% of school-age children at some time have at least one wart.
- In children, warts tend to disappear over a period of several months to years, but sometimes they can be very stubborn and resistant to many types of treatment.
- In many adults, warts often prove even more difficult to destroy.

What causes them?

- All warts are caused by a type of virus, the human papillomavirus (HPV).

What do they look like?

Their appearance depends on their location.

- **Common warts** generally grow on the hands and fingers and around the nails. They are frequently seen on the knees and elbows, especially in children. They usually have a bumpy, cauliflower-like appearance.
- **Plantar** (not "planter's") **warts** are located on the soles of the feet. When they grow in clusters, they are known as mosaic warts. Plantar warts often have "black dots."
- **Flat warts** are small, smooth, skin colored, and flat. In children, they are most often seen on the face. In adults, they are seen on the legs in women and on the face in both sexes. Shaving tends to spread them.

How do I know when the warts are gone?

When they don't come back.

How do you get warts and how to avoid spreading them?

Never shake hands! Never kiss anyone! Never walk barefoot! Live in a bubble!
And you still can get them and spread them!

Wart Facts

- As you can see, the numerous treatments that are used for warts are testimony to the fact that we don't have any definite "cure" for them.
- More often than not, warts tend to "cure" themselves over time.
- The hero of successful wart treatment is usually the last person to treat the wart or the last person to recommend a treatment before the wart goes away.
- The "wart hero" may have been a wart charmer, a hypnotist, or a person who recommended a folk medicine, such as the application of garlic or aloe vera, or even... a dermatologist!

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How are warts treated?

The choice of one or more of the following methods of treatment depends on: the type of wart, the location of the wart(s), and the age of the patient:

Home treatment

Peeling Agents That Contain Salicylic Acid

- These are available in over-the-counter products such as Duofilm, Occlusal, and Compound-W. Also, 40% salicylic acid plasters that are cut to the size of the wart are available. These preparations provide the best treatment for small children in whom warts often disappear on their own.
- For best results, the affected area should be hydrated first by soaking it in warm water for five minutes before applying the medication.
- It's also a good method for plantar warts—one that is painless, inexpensive, and does not require office visits.

Office treatment

Freezing (Cryotherapy With Liquid Nitrogen)

- Liquid nitrogen is applied with a cotton swab or with a cryotherapy "freezing gun."
- Freezing is best for warts on hands.
- It's fast, and many warts can be treated on each visit; however, it can be painful and may require many office visits.

Burning and Scraping (Light Electrocautery and Blunt Dissection)

- This method is best for warts on the knees, elbows, and backs of the hands.
- The pain is bearable in most adults, but it requires local anesthesia and may cause scarring.

Other Office Treatments

- Lasers, blistering chemicals ("bug juice"), and acids are just a few of many treatments that are being used to treat warts.
- There have been reports of the successful use of Aldara cream on flat warts, some common warts, and plantar warts. You need a prescription for Aldara cream.

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