



bliss dermatology  
Michelle Pennie, MD

## Warts

- Warts are very common and caused by infection of the skin by the human papilloma virus (HPV). There are several different types of warts caused by numerous different strains of HPV.
- Warts most commonly appear on the hands, feet, genitalia, face, and legs but can appear on any part of the body.
- The treatments available for warts are aimed at both destroying the infected wart tissue and stimulating an immune response to help your body fight off the virus.
- Furthermore, the virus is able to "hide" in the upper layers of skin to avoid your immune system.
- This makes the treatment of warts very difficult and often frustrating for both patients and doctors. Multiple treatments are usually needed and are successful 75% to 80% of the time.

## Who Gets Warts?

Anyone can get warts. Some people are more prone to getting a wart virus than others.

These people are:

- Children and teens.
- People who bite their nails or pick at hangnails.
- People with a weakened immune system (the body's defense system). This includes our elderly population.

## Treatment Options

- Cryotherapy: Freezing wart(s) with a very cold substance (liquid nitrogen) is an effective and common treatment for warts.
  - The wart(s) are frozen off to kill the viral activity in and around the affected area. The treated areas will become sore and/or red for the next few hours.
  - You will experience a small amount of discomfort and possibly have a blister.
  - Adverse reactions include darkening or lightening of the skin after treatment.

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- At times, when the wart is too thick and/or callused, we will shave/pare down the thickened skin prior to spraying the wart(s) with liquid nitrogen. This will allow the freezing to easily penetrate the affected cell. Depending on the size of the wart, multiple treatments may be needed at 2-3 weeks apart.
- Biopsy/Removal: sometimes we will numb up warts and shave them flat using a sharp razor blade.
  - We send these specimens to our pathologist to make sure there is nothing atypical, but this can be curative for more superficial warts.
  - Removal can leave a scar or change in pigment in the skin.
- Salicylic Acid: Over the counter treatment for warts (Dr. Scholl's®, Compound W®).
  - Directions: Apply the topical medication to the affected area and cover tightly with tape (preferably silver duct tape) to occlude the lesion every night after a shower or warm soak.
  - Keep the medication on for 24 hours before removing/changing. When the salicylic acid is removed from the affected area, the wart(s) area should turn the skin white/softened.
  - Use an emery board to rub off the softened tissue before changing to a new salicylic acid application. Make sure you do NOT reuse the emery board on another site to avoid spreading the virus.
  - Repeat nightly until the wart is gone or until your next appointment
- Aldara® Cream: Aldara® Cream (Imiquimod) is a topical medication that activates your own immune system to help attack the cells infected with the virus.
  - The cream works for resistant or recurrent warts that do not respond to freezing and/or salicylic acid.
  - The cream works best when wart(s) are softened (usually with salicylic acid-see above).
    - Directions: Open the medication packet & apply a small amount to the affected area.
    - Cover the lesion with a band-aid.
    - The next morning, wash off the area with soap & water. Repeat as directed.

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