

## Warts: Verruca Vulgaris

### What they are?

Warts are caused by a virus, the human papilloma virus. They are contagious!

### Who gets them?

Anyone! Warts are very common. Some are more resistant to the wart virus than others. People who have small cracks in their skin (for example: people with dry cracked hands, people with eczema, people with very sweaty feet) tend to get warts more frequently than others.

### How do I treat them?

There are many ways to treat warts. NO METHOD IS FAST! For those who choose to treat them, I recommend a home treatment regularly in combination with an office-based treatment repeated every 3-4 weeks until the wart is gone. Warts on thin skin respond faster than warts on the hands and feet. I will summarize the methods I offer, and their side effects, below:

Do nothing (no treatment)- the average wart goes away on its own in seven years. Sometimes no treatment is the best option. This is often the case for very young children who are not bothered by their warts.

#### 1. Home Treatment-

- A. Wart Removers- Most over-the-counter products include salicylic acids. The strongest acid you can buy is 40%. The brand name I prefer is "Wart Stick." It can be found at Walgreens (in the store or on-line). Wart Stick comes in a chap stick container and is waxy. You should apply it to the wart very thickly. I find it easiest to use a plastic knife or a flat toothpick to scrape the medicine off the stick and apply it to the wart. Cover with a band-aid or duct tape. This should be repeated twice daily, so that the wart is always covered with medicine. After a few days, the skin will turn white and moist. You will notice that layers of the wart will peel off. The wart is NOT gone- keep treating. If your fingers touch the wart or the layers that shed- wash with soap and water to prevent spread of the wart. Repeat the treatment for several weeks. IF YOU CANNOT FIND WART STICK, you may also use "Mediplast." Mediplast is like a medicated tape that you cut to fit the wart. If the skin gets too sore, then stop for a few days. Once the soreness is gone then restart but apply less frequently. The purpose of salicylic acid is to peel off dead skin which is where the wart virus lives.
- B. Freezing Products- There are freezing products available over the counter, but I find them expensive and minimally effective.
- C. Aldara- Aldara is a prescription product that is applied to the wart 3-7 times per week for up to 3 months. It works best on thin moist skin, therefore is minimally effective alone on common warts. It is also very expensive! I use this occasionally in combination with a salicylic acid product and office-based treatments. It may cause some irritation and redness which is appropriate. If the irritation and redness gets too sore or severe, stop Aldara and let the skin heal. Once the irritation becomes tolerable, then restart Aldara but apply less frequently. Occasionally, it can cause "flu-like symptoms" that disappear soon after the treatment is stopped.
- D. Immune stimulators (see below) by prescription
- E. Duct tape- In select patients this treatment may increase effectiveness of office treatments.  
INSTRUCTIONS FOR TAPE OCCLUSION THERAPY OF WARTS  
(ADHESIOTHERAPY): This treatment works best for warts on the fingers but can be used for warts on feet, toes and body.
  - i. Apply ½ inch waterproof tape in several layers to the wart, taking care not to cut off the circulation to the fingers.
  - ii. Blenderm tape (made by 3M) works very well, but is hard to find. Other tapes include Duct tape or other waterproof tapes available at pharmacies. Try to use ½ inch width since it is easier to conform to fingers, especially in children.
  - iii. The tape should be left on for 6 days, and only removed if it is soaked through or falling off, in which case it should be immediately reapplied. After 6 days, it should be removed for 1 day.

- iv. However, if you do not like the above method, then apply duct tape nightly and remove in the morning. This works best in combination with applying salicylic acid (such as Wart Stick or Compoud W) under the duct tape.
2. Office Treatments. ALL require multiple treatments for success.
- A. Freezing/ Liquid Nitrogen- Liquid Nitrogen is sprayed on the skin. It is so cold, it can feel hot. The freezing hurts a bit, but should not last longer than 20 minutes. That evening the skin will begin to die. Occasionally, a blister will form- if this happens it is OK to clean the blister with alcohol, clean a clean needle with alcohol and puncture the roof of the blister so that the fluid will drain. This will relieve the pain. Wash all that comes in contact with the blister fluid to prevent spread of the wart. If no blister forms, the skin will die, dry and crust. After a couple of weeks the dead skin will peel off. It, too, is contagious. Freezing usually leaves no permanent mark on the skin, but can leave a brown color change to the skin that can last for several months. In some people, the area will heal with a spot that is lighter than the surrounding skin. This lightening is often permanent.
  - B. Cantharidin/ Blister Beetle Juice- Cantharidin is nice to use in children because it does not cause immediate pain. It feels like someone is applying water to the skin. Cantharidin should be allowed to dry, covered with a band-aid and left alone for 6-8 hours. At that time, it should be washed off. Cantharidin often causes a blister to form in the skin. The pressure from the blister can be uncomfortable and sometimes painful. To relieve the pain, clean the blister with alcohol, clean a clean needle with alcohol and puncture the roof of the blister so that the fluid will drain. This will relieve the pain. Wash all that comes in contact with the blister fluid to prevent spread of the wart.
  - C. Trichloroacetic Acid/ TCA- TCA is an acid applied directly to the wart. It feels like water at first, and then causes the area to itch a bit. Depending on location of the wart, it can start to sting, but is usually mild, and lasts less than 5-10 minutes. This is a great option for children.
  - D. Podophyllin is a brown painless medicine and keeps the virus from growing. When applied it feels like someone is applying water to the skin. Podophyllin should be allowed to dry, covered with a band-aid and left alone for 6-8 hours. At that time, it should be washed off. Occasionally, it can cause some irritation to the skin.
  - E. Immune stimulators (squaric acid, DNCB or DCP) is applied in the office directly to the wart. These medications are painless but can cause itching or a mild red rash at the site of application. Once the treatment has been applied in the office 1-2 times and is well tolerated, a prescription for the medicine can be given for home treatments. Apply initially 3 times per week. However, if there is minimal response, you can increase to daily as tolerated. Occasionally, I will opt to inject the wart with an immune stimulator known as Candida antigen.
  - F. Surgery or Laser Therapy-These treatment options are reserved for certain warts that are resistant to other treatments. The wart virus can live in normal skin such that the wart may recur after the visible portion is removed. However, in certain select cases, such therapies may be warranted. Laser therapy is offered at the OKC office but the cost can range from \$100-200 each session which is paid out of pocket. One can file a claim to the insurance company for reimbursement. Reimbursement is dependent on the insurance carrier and plan.
  - G. Bleomycin Injections- This treatment is reserved for the most stubborn warts as it is a chemotherapy drug. However, it is very effective in certain cases. The main side effect is discomfort.

The treatment to be used on your wart depends on its location and size, your type of skin and the judgment of the dermatologist. Sometimes, new warts will form while existing ones are being destroyed. All we can do is treat the new warts when they become large enough to be seen. No matter what treatment is used, warts sometimes fail to disappear or may return weeks or months after an apparent cure. If this happens the treatment may be repeated, or a different method may be used to get rid of the warts.