

Warts and verrucas

Warts and verrucas are small lumps on the skin that most people have at some point in their life. They usually go away on their own but this may take months or even years.

Warts don't cause you any harm but some people find them itchy, painful or embarrassing. Verrucas are more likely to be painful.

This leaflet describes some of the ways you can treat your warts or verrucae if they bother you, keep coming back or are painful.

How to treat warts and verrucas

Your pharmacist can usually identify whether your lump is a wart or verruca by looking at it and can give you advice about the best treatment for you

- Most warts and verrucas will eventually clear up without treatment
- You can buy wart and verruca treatments over the counter from pharmacies although these treatments can take up to 3 months to complete, may irritate your skin and don't always work
- You shouldn't use these treatments on your face or genital areas
- If you have diabetes, check with a podiatrist or your pharmacist before self-treating.

Pharmacy treatments include:

Salicylic acid (creams, gels, skin paints and medicated plasters)

- These burn the top layer of affected skin and need to be applied every day.
- Before using topical salicylic acid:
 - soak the wart in water for about five minutes to soften it
 - apply petroleum jelly to the skin around the wart to protect it
 - once a week, gently file the wart down a little using an emery board

Dimethyl ether propane containing cold sprays

- these freeze the wart, but they're not thought to work as well as salicylic acid

There's not enough evidence to suggest applying duct tape to a wart or verruca works, so this isn't generally recommended.

Preventing warts and verrucas

It's difficult to prevent warts and verrucas completely, but the following measures can help stop them spreading:

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ wash your hands after touching a wart or verruca ✓ change your socks daily if you have a verruca ✓ cover warts and verrucas with a plaster when swimming ✓ take care not to cut a wart when shaving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ share towels, flannels, socks or shoes if you have a wart or verruca ✗ bite your nails or suck fingers with warts on ✗ walk barefoot in public places if you have a verruca ✗ scratch or pick a wart

See your GP for advice if:

- you have a wart on your face or genitals – don't treat these yourself
- you have lots of warts or get warts frequently
- a wart or verucca changes in appearance, spreads or causes significant pain, distress or embarrassment

If seeking advice from your GP, be aware that GPs are unable to remove warts or veruccas; nor refer patients for their removal, on the NHS where this is for purely cosmetic reasons. Therefore, patients should seek advice from a GP in order to rule out other diagnoses rather than expecting a treatment for warts or veruccas.

It is expected that GPs will not prescribe over the counter (OTC) medicines where it is reasonable and appropriate for patients to obtain low cost OTC medication direct from pharmacies as advised by the GMC.

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