

Warts

Your recent skin biopsy has been conclusively diagnosed as Warts. These skin growths have been recognized in humans for thousands of years. However, because warts appear suddenly, and very often disappear with no treatment--particularly in children--their origin and wildly bizarre remedies have been the subject of folklore and controversy for centuries. Not until the late 1940's did scientists learn warts are actually caused by a virus called the *human papillomavirus* (HPV).

There are currently more than 100 different strains of HPV that cause warts, including the common wart, those are the ones that appear on the fingers; flat warts that appear on places frequently shaved, and plantar warts which appear on the soles of feet. While most warts are a benign, unsightly nuisance, some HPV strains cause genital warts, which are a serious health risk that can lead to cancer.

Where do they come from?

The virus that causes warts is fairly common and is transmitted by contact between people, or from contact with an item such as a towel that someone with warts used; or in children, sharing of toys that have been used by someone having warts. If you have a break in the skin, bite your nails, have irritated cuticles (hangnails), or a weakened immune system, you are more vulnerable to the virus. Warts very often develop in clusters, and can spread to different areas on your body. What looks like one wart may actually be several.

Unique Distinctions of Warts

Other skin conditions that can look like warts are corns and calluses, which occur in the same body regions as warts, such as the hands or feet. Other more serious skin problems like squamous cell carcinoma, seborrheic keratosis, and other conditions, also mimic warts. That's why it's important that any skin change be examined professionally. A dermatologist can usually identify a wart just by looking, but there are also two distinctive physical characteristics

that are unique to warts. The first is the change in normal skin patterns that look "erased," such as the print ridges on the bottom of the foot in the case of plantar warts. The second is if a physician scrapes the wart with a scalpel for biopsy or removal, and it results in a single "pinpoint" of bleeding, which is the center of the wart.

Treatment Options for Warts

Depending on the location and extent of your wart infection, your doctor may use one, or a combination of procedures, to remove warts. These include freezing the wart tissue, which causes the affected tissue to die off, and then cutting the wart out with a specially-shaped instrument. Or a chemical can be applied, which causes the tissue under the wart to blister, and then in several days, the doctor can cut away the dead wart tissue. Sometimes first burning off the wart with a heated wire instrument, then scraping away the affected tissue is used. In some situations a combination of these procedures are needed. If one of these techniques is not an ideal treatment choice or it fails to work, other options include:

- injection directly in the wart of an anticancer medication,
- laser treatment,
- application of a chemical peel liquid you can do at home each day,
- immunotherapy using a chemical your immune system responds to which causes the wart to disappear.

Contrary to centuries of folklore about the origin of warts, people can only get warts from a virus, called human papilloma virus, (HPV) and they can often disappear on their own.

Screening for Genital Warts is Essential

A genital warts infection is a sexually-transmitted disease (STD) that is of special concern to health providers because it is very contagious, often has no symptoms, and can lead to a cancerous condition. One study estimates that half of women affected with genital warts had no symptoms and were unaware of their condition. Treatment is much the same for other wart infections, but sometimes surgery may be necessary.

This material is intended for patient education and information only. It does not constitute advice, nor should it be taken to suggest or replace professional medical care from your physician.

Your treatment options may vary, depending upon medical history and current condition. Only your physician and you can determine your best option.

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