

## Treatment of warts

Warts on the skin can be a long-term problem. They will not disappear until the body's immune system wakes up to their presence and mounts an attack against the virus that causes them, which can take up to two years.

Available treatments can help speed the natural clearance of warts by irritating the skin and simultaneously stimulating the immune system or destroying the skin in which the virus is living and hopefully coincidentally removing the virus.

The choice of treatment will depend on the number of warts, the sites, the discomfort and nuisance they cause as well as patient preference. No single treatment is guaranteed to work. Each treatment step should be used for a minimum of eighteen weeks before moving to another treatment. Treatment of warts in one area may stimulate an immune response, which will result in resolution of warts elsewhere.

A good and safe initial approach is occlusion with duct tape (silver variety). This is simple and low cost and may help to prevent the spreading of the warts. Apply a small piece of duct tape directly to the wart once every four to seven days; then remove the tape, clean the area with soap and water and remove the dead skin using an emery board. Apply another piece of tape twelve hours later. Repeat this cycle for four to six weeks. Stop if there is any localized skin reaction.

Wart ointments that contain salicylic +/- lactic acid or glutaraldehyde are available over the counter. Options include:

- Occlusal (salicylic acid) – common and plantar warts. This is not licensed for under two years of age.
- Verrugon (salicylic acid) – plantar warts. This is not licensed for under two years of age.
- Salactol (salicylic acid/lactic acid) – warts, particularly plantar warts.
- Salatac (salicylic acid/lactic acid) – warts and verrucas.
- Glutaraldehyde – warts, particularly plantar warts (licensed for children – age range not specified by manufacturer).

Preparation instructions offer advice on preparing the skin before treatment. It is best to follow the instructions on the pack but preparation usually includes soaking the wart in warm water for ten minutes, then

rubbing it with a pumice stone or nail file. The ointment or paint is then applied to the wart taking care to avoid the normal surrounding skin. Petroleum jelly, such as Vaseline, can be applied to protect the normal skin around the wart. Using salicylic acid and Glutaraldehyde on alternating days may be helpful.

It is important to pare down the warts; this increases the efficacy of the topical treatments.