

Warts and Veruccas

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from Warts and/or Veruccas. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Useful facts

- **What are Warts and Veruccas?** They are small rough lumps on the skin . Warts are most commonly found on the hands, veruccas usually found on the soles of the feet, although they can also appear around the toes. It may become rough and bumpy with a cauliflower like appearance and may develop a black spot in the middle, which is caused by bleeding. A verucca can grow to half an inch in diameter and may spread in a cluster of small warts (called a mosaic).
- **Who gets them?** Most people develop warts or veruccas at some time in their lives, usually before the age of 20. If you have a poor immune system you may develop lots of warts which are difficult to clear.
- **Is it serious?** They are harmless, but occasionally they can cause a sharp, burning pain if they are on a weight bearing area such as the ball or heel of the foot. They are most common in children or people who are more susceptible to the virus, which can run in families.
- **What's causing it?** They are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) which is contagious, but can only be caught by direct contact. It thrives in warm, moist environments, such as swimming pools, changing room floors and bathrooms. It is not the same virus that causes anal or genital warts.
- **Are they contagious?** Yes, but the risk of passing them to others is low. You need close skin to skin contact to pass it on. You are much more likely to spread it to other areas of yourself.

What can I expect to happen?

- ✓ **Duration** Warts often clear up on their own without any treatments but this could take a few years. If they are not causing any problems there is no need to treat them. Half the number of children with warts will find they have disappeared within a year without treatment and two thirds will have gone within 2 years. They are likely to last longer in adults. If you decide to treat it can take several weeks to notice any improvement and 3-9 months of perseverance for them to go completely.

Continued overleaf

What can I do myself to get better – now and in the future?

- ✓ **Avoidance** Minimise the chances of catching a verruca by keeping your feet clean and dry and covering up any cuts and scratches. Avoid walking bare foot in communal showers or changing rooms and don't share towels.
- ✓ **Stop them spreading** Do no scratch or pick at them. Biting or sucking warts can spread them to your lips. Change socks daily. Use a waterproof barrier, a plaster or some paints will do this.
- ✓ **Self removal** Use one or more of the following techniques, creams and freezing are much effective after filing.
- ✓ **Filing** Use warm water and sea salt. Soak the wart for 10 to 15 minutes in warm salt water to moisten the skin. Scrape the dead skin layers of the wart using a nail file, pumice stone or mild sandpaper. Some people find filing is more effective if the skin is dry.
- ✓ **Over the counter creams** Topical treatments can be brought from a pharmacy with instructions on how to use. Most contain salicylic acid which removes the top layer but do not usually cause discomfort.
- ✓ **Freezing (Cryotherapy)** Over the counter chemical freezing kits can be used at 10-14 day intervals. Freezing treatment is painful and cause temporary redness and blistering.
- ✓ **Other treatments** Some people find teatree oil or the application of duct tape can be beneficial. Boosting the immune system, eg by taking a multivitamin can speed up the process.

When should I seek medical help?

Seek advice from your pharmacist or GP if treatment with over the counter preparations hasn't worked for you, and the wart/verucca(s) are impairing your quality of life.

- **Uncertainty** If you are uncertain whether the lump(s) is a wart or verucca.
- **Multiple** You have multiple warts and/or veruccas that are not responding to treatment.

Where can I find out more?

Your pharmacist can also help you with assessing your symptoms and advise on suitable treatments.



111 is the NHS non-emergency number. It's fast, easy and free. Call 111 and speak to a highly trained adviser, supported by healthcare professionals. They will ask you a series of questions to assess your symptoms and immediately direct you to the best medical care for you.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.