



WARTS (VERRUCA)

Kathleen W. Judge, M.D.

Medical Director

*Diplomate American Board of Dermatology
Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery*

Warts are caused by a viral infection of the skin. Lesions can be single or multiple and usually appear as flesh colored bumps with a small rough core. On the bottoms of the feet, they can be flat spots that penetrate deep into the skin. These lesions are benign, but can cause pain or be irritated by pressure or friction. When they appear around the nails, they can alter the way the nail grows. Warts can get very thick and large and sometimes can split and bleed. Because they are contagious through physical contact, they can be spread by trauma, such as picking, biting them or shaving over them. Once infected with the wart virus, a person can develop warts periodically throughout their lifetime.

Viral disorders, as a whole, are generally difficult to treat and there is no specific effective treatment for warts. Because these lesions will eventually clear spontaneously and because some treatments may be painful and can increase the possibility of scarring, it is important to choose a therapy carefully. As a result, each patient is considered for treatment individually. Your provider will select therapy based on a number of factors including, but not limited to, the extent of the lesions, their location, the duration of infection, the risk of spread and development of new lesions, and age and nature of the patient.

Over the counter therapies and home remedies are numerous, but frequently ineffective. Some common treatment methods include freezing (cryosurgery), scraping (curettage), or application of irritating medications or chemicals, such as Efudex, Retin-A, or Cantheradin. There is also a new topical medication, Aldara, which works by stimulating an immune response that can successfully clear viral lesions. Some insurance companies, unfortunately, do not cover the cost of this medication.

No matter what treatment is attempted, it may be necessary to change therapy, to employ multiple therapies, either consecutively or simultaneously, to treat multiple times, or to continue treatment for weeks or sometimes months before lesions resolve. Because it is impossible to predict the course of treatment or the necessary duration of treatment, and, on rare occasions, all treatments attempted are unsuccessful, the results of treatment cannot be guaranteed. Consideration must always be given to the benign nature of these lesions and the possibility of eventual clearing without any treatment at all.