

Plantar Warts

What is a plantar wart?

A plantar wart is a small, non-cancerous growth on the bottom of the foot. Plantar warts often develop where friction or pressure occurs, such as on the ball of the foot. The word plantar refers to the sole of the foot. Similar warts can occur on other areas of the body, such as the hands. Plantar warts are more common in children and young adults.

What causes a plantar wart?

Plantar warts are caused by the virus called HPV (human papillomavirus) and can be spread by person-to-person contact, or walking barefoot on moist surfaces (pool deck, locker room, etc) infected with the virus. Wearing footwear in such places can help prevent them.

What are the symptoms of plantar warts?

Plantar warts cause a thick, rough, and often raised patch of skin on the bottom of the foot. The wart may have black dots on it, these dots are dried blood. The wart may cause pain, discomfort, or cause trouble with walking.

Call your healthcare provider if the plantar wart:

- Becomes too painful or causes difficulty walking.
- Does not go away on their own or with over the counter and at-home treatments.
- Increases in number or size.

How are plantar warts treated?

Many plantar warts go away without any treatment, for those that are painful or do not go away, several treatments are available.

Over the counter:

- **Salicylic acid.** This is put directly on the wart. It may come in the form of a liquid, ointment, pad, or patch. Don't use salicylic acid treatment for more than 12 weeks without talking with your healthcare provider.

Office treatment:

- **Debridement.** A sterile scalpel is used to cut away dead parts of the wart. This is often done by provider before using other treatments.
- **Cryotherapy.** Uses liquid nitrogen on the wart with a cotton swab or spray. This treatment might be painful.
- **Laser treatment.** Involves the use of laser light to heat and destroy blood vessels within the plantar wart, cutting off its blood supply.
- **Immunotherapy.** Uses a topical chemical to cause a mild allergic reaction. This will prompt the immune system to eliminate plantar warts caused by HPV.
- **Electrocautery.** A procedure where a weak electric current is applied to burn off plantar warts, effectively removing them.
- **Cantharidin.** A blistering agent applied in office that removes the top layer of skin. It is common to see a blood blister and/or some redness following use of cantharidin.

Plantar wart treatment - follow-up care

- Keep area clean and dry following treatment, unless otherwise specified.
- Follow up with your healthcare provider as advised.
- Avoid walking barefoot on moist surfaces (pool deck, locker room, etc) to prevent reinfection.

When to call our office following treatment

- Signs of infection (red streaks, pus, smelly or colored discharge, or fever) appear.
- You have heavy bleeding or bleeding that won't stop with light pressure.
- The wart doesn't go away after several weeks of self-care.
- New warts appear on feet, hands, or face.

References:

WebMD Ignite Clinical References *Plantar Warts*

WebMD Ignite Clinical References *Understanding Plantar Warts*