

Warts on the Feet and Ankles

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Warts are common skin growths caused by a viral infection in the top layer of the skin. When they appear on the feet and ankles, they are known as plantar warts. While often harmless, warts can cause discomfort and may require treatment to alleviate symptoms or prevent their spread.

What Are Warts?

Warts are small, rough-textured growths on the skin caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). Plantar warts, specifically, develop on the soles of the feet or around the ankles. Due to their location, they may become painful when pressure is applied, such as during walking or standing.

Plantar warts can be solitary or appear in clusters, sometimes forming a "mosaic wart," a group of tightly packed warts. Unlike other warts on the body, plantar warts are often pushed inward by the weight of the body, creating a flat, callused appearance.



Causes of Warts

Warts on the feet and ankles are caused by direct contact with HPV. This virus thrives in warm, moist environments, such as:

1. **Public Showers or Pools:** Walking barefoot in communal areas increases the risk of exposure.
2. **Skin Breaks:** Small cuts, scrapes, or cracks in the skin make it easier for the virus to enter.
3. **Contaminated Surfaces:** Sharing shoes, socks, or towels with an infected person can spread the virus.

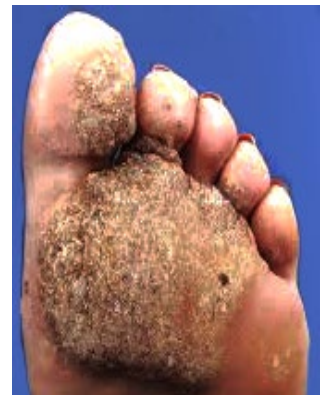
Although HPV exposure is common, not everyone who comes into contact with it will develop warts. Factors such as a weakened immune system or skin condition may increase susceptibility.

Symptoms of Warts



Plantar warts can present a variety of symptoms, including:

1. **Small, Rough Growths:** Warts are often circular, with a rough or grainy texture.
2. **Black Dots:** Small black dots (called "wart seeds") may appear on the surface, representing clotted blood vessels.
3. **Pain or Tenderness:** Pressure from walking or standing can cause discomfort.
4. **Callus Formation:** The wart may develop a thickened layer of skin around it due to friction.
5. **Clusters:** In some cases, warts may form in groups or spread to nearby areas.



Diagnosing Warts



A healthcare provider can typically diagnose warts through a visual examination. In some cases, additional tests may be performed, such as:

- **Shaving the Wart:** Removing the top layer of the wart to check for tiny black dots (clotted blood vessels).
- **Skin Biopsy:** Rarely, a small sample of the wart is taken to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatments for Warts

Treatment options vary based on the size, location, and severity of the warts. While some warts resolve on their own over time, others may require intervention. Common treatments include:

1. Over-the-Counter (OTC) Treatments:

- **Salicylic Acid:** Available as gels, pads, or solutions, salicylic acid gradually removes the wart layer by layer. Soaking the wart in warm water beforehand can enhance effectiveness.
- **Cryotherapy Kits:** These OTC treatments use freezing agents to destroy the wart.



2. Professional Medical Treatments:



- **Cryotherapy:** A healthcare provider applies liquid nitrogen to freeze and destroy the wart tissue.
- **Cantharidin:** A chemical applied to the wart that causes it to blister and eventually fall off.
- **Surgical Removal:** In severe cases, warts may be removed using minor surgical procedures like curettage.
- **Laser Therapy:** Lasers can target and destroy wart tissue while minimizing damage to surrounding skin.

3. Immune-Boosting Treatments:

- **Immunotherapy:** Medications or injections that stimulate the immune system to fight the virus.



4. Alternative Therapies:

- Some individuals find success with natural remedies, such as applying duct tape or using essential oils like tea tree oil. However, these methods may lack strong scientific backing.

Preventing Warts on the Feet and Ankles

To reduce the risk of developing or spreading warts:

1. **Wear Protective Footwear:** Use sandals or water shoes in communal areas like pools or locker rooms.
2. **Avoid Picking at Warts:** This can spread the virus to other areas of the body or to other people.
3. **Keep Feet Clean and Dry:** Maintain good foot hygiene to prevent the virus from thriving.

4. **Don't Share Personal Items:** Avoid sharing socks, shoes, or towels.
5. **Strengthen Your Immune System:** A healthy diet, regular exercise, and proper sleep can help bolster your body's defenses.

When to See a Doctor

While many warts go away on their own, you should consult a healthcare provider if:

- The wart becomes painful or changes in appearance.
- Over-the-counter treatments are ineffective after a few weeks.
- The wart spreads or multiplies.
- You have a compromised immune system.

Conclusion

Warts on the feet and ankles, though common, can be bothersome and painful. By understanding their causes, recognizing symptoms, and exploring effective treatment options, individuals can manage warts and prevent their recurrence. If at-home treatments are unsuccessful, professional medical care can provide relief and ensure proper healing.