



FOOT FELONS

Prevention and treatment of these “dirty little secrets”

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Warts as a whole are caused by a virus called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Warts on your feet are one of those very common problems that affect a huge portion of the population. Even with how common they are, they still remain a “dirty little secret.” Having warts carries with it a sense of shame. People often assume that it’s a hygiene issue and usually immediately begin speculating on who, what, where, and when; looking for a cause.

Well, let’s start by saying that in the vast majority of cases, it has nothing to do with how well we take care of ourselves, and even more noteworthy is that we are ALL at risk of contracting them. So what are they? What causes them? How do you get rid of them? And how do you prevent them?

What are warts?

One main type of wart is the Plantar wart, or more accurately, *Verruca Plantaris*, which refers to a wart located on the feet. Each strain can have certain nuances of lesions; overall they will all produce a small cauliflower-like lesion on the foot. They are usually located on the bottom of the foot, but sometimes on the toes as well. They can be painful, cause bleeding, and are highly contagious. Often times, self inoculation will cause a cluster of warts or a mosaic type pattern that can become quite extensive without proper treatment. Each one may have small, dark pinpoint-like dots

in them, which are little blood vessels immersed in the lesion. These small dots are usually pretty accurate markers for identifying them.

What causes them?

Warts as a whole are caused by a virus called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). These viruses are everywhere, and we are especially vulnerable to them while barefoot in public places, i.e., pools and locker rooms. For reasons unknown, HPV seems to have a longer period of survival outside of a human being than some other viruses, making it even easier to catch and spread from person to person, or even from pool deck to person!

Since this is a virus that stays dormant in your body, any stresses on your immune system or other types of trauma can cause an outbreak. Many times they are seen in pregnancy and treatment during this period should be as conservative as possible due to some potential risks associated with the chemicals used to destroy them. I would recommend consultation with your obstetrician before having anything done, and if possible, have your doctors communicate with each other prior to starting any treatment plans.

Children are very susceptible to warts as well, usually associated with running around barefoot in school gyms or camp

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pools. Again, if your child has any other medical conditions or allergies always ask your podiatrist and pediatrician to discuss which plan might best suit that particular patient.

How to get rid of them

The good news about this condition is that the symptoms are treatable. Once you are infected with the virus it will remain in your body for life, but the warts themselves can be removed. There are a vast array of methods for controlling and removing them. Based on the severity, size, duration, quantity, age, activity level, and degree of pain your doctor can pick a procedure and/or treatment plan that will allow you the best chance for recovery over the shortest time possible.

For smaller, more localized cases a regime of debridements in the doctor's office and the application of special topical medications that can destroy the wart tissue are used. In more severe cases one may consider freezing or heating the warts to destroy the lesions. Surgical excision is usually reserved for those with long-standing cases who have failed more conservative methods. Removing warts surgically can get complicated and require skin flaps and/or grafts to help expedite the healing process. In the majority of cases we deal with, simple conservative methods are effective. However, you must be patient! Warts can be pretty stubborn and require quite a few treat-

ments before they are completely eradicated.

Prevention

So, let's say you've never had a wart, or you just recently got rid of one – how can you prevent them in the future? Wear shoes! Don't walk around barefoot in your gym, in the school locker room, or in a public bathroom. In the short time it takes to throw on a

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pair of shoes, it can save you endless hours of multiple trips to your doctor's office.

We are commonly asked if it is okay to walk on the beach barefoot. The answer is yes. Contracting a virus like HPV from the sand at the beach is unlikely and really not of concern. That is not to say that broken glass and sharp shells can't provide other obstacles to a nice day by the water, so we always recommend shoe gear.

Remember, if you are not sure if what you have is a wart, have it evaluated by a doctor. You are always better off erring on the side of caution than risking more extensive infection.

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