

Verrucae / warts

Information sheet

What is a verruca?

A verruca is simply a wart that is found on the sole of your feet. They can also appear around the toes. Verrucae are slightly raised and circular in shape, with a thickened rim of surrounding skin. The surface may have black dots ('pepper-pot' appearance). There may be several verrucae or just one. It may become rough and bumpy with a cauliflower-like appearance.

What causes them?

Verrucae are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). This virus 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. If someone with an infected bare foot walks across the poolside, it may release virus-infected cells onto the floor. If you then walk on the same floor, you can pick up the virus.

Is it serious?

Sometimes, verrucae are uncomfortable because they are on part of the foot where you bear weight. Most verrucae are pain-free and they will not really inconvenience you.

Who gets them?

They tend to be common in children, especially teenagers. Some people seem to be more susceptible to the virus, whereas others are immune.

What is the difference between a corn and a verruca?

A verruca is a viral infection, whereas a corn or callus is simply layers of dead skin. Verrucae tend not to be painful; corns tend to be very painful and appear mostly on weight-bearing areas.

Treatment for verrucae

There is no need to treat warts if they are not causing you any problems. Most go away by themselves within one or two years. There is no treatment that is guaranteed to remove verrucae.

Do not self-treat if you have diabetes or circulation problems.

Salicylic acid

Over-the-counter treatments are available from pharmacies. Most of these contain salicylic acid as their active ingredient. Salicylic acid and other verruca treatments also destroy healthy skin, so it is important to protect the skin around the verruca. Apply the medication following the instructions, but stop the treatment if your skin becomes sore.

Cryotherapy

Very cold liquid nitrogen is sprayed onto the verruca to freeze and destroy the cells. Treatment can be very painful. This treatment is not carried out by our service as it has been proven to be less effective than home treatment.

Tape (occlusive wrapping)

Another simple treatment that has been found to be effective is applying a piece of duct tape over the verruca. This method is safe and pain-free.

Place a piece of duct tape on the verruca.

Leave the tape in place for six days, replacing any duct tape that falls off with a new piece as soon as possible.

After six days, remove tape and soak the verruca in warm water.

Gently rub the verruca with an emery board.

Next morning, apply a new piece of duct tape to begin another six-day cycle for up to two months or until it is gone.

Tips for prevention

Avoid walking barefoot

Change shoes and socks daily

Keep feet clean and dry

Check children's feet periodically

Avoid direct contact with warts from other people or other parts of the body

Cover any cuts or scratches

Wear flip flops in communal showers or changing rooms

Don't share towels

Wear verruca socks when swimming

If a verruca does appear, avoid touching or scratching it as it may spread into a cluster of

several warts.

Wash your hands after contact with the verrucae to reduce the risk of them spreading to other parts of the body.

The Greenwich Podiatry Service follows the protocol of Greenwich and Bexley Dermatology in that verrucae treatments have only been demonstrated effective when used repeatedly at home. We therefore do not cut out, burn or remove them in clinic.

Contact us

Oxleas Adults' Community Greenwich Podiatry Service

0208 320 3550

Monday – Friday

8:30am – 4:30pm

It is not always possible for us to answer the phone straight away.

Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

Please let us know if you require an interpreter or have any additional needs.