



C H I

## what is cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy refers to a treatment in which surface skin lesions are frozen using liquid nitrogen. Lesions that may be treated in this way include:

- viral warts
- skin tags
- some benign lesions such as solar and seborrheic keratoses

Occasionally a skin specialist may use cryotherapy to treat superficial skin cancers with cryotherapy. Cryotherapy is not suitable to treat melanomas or any undiagnosed pigmented skin lesion.

## risks

Cryotherapy may be painful at the time of treatment and for a variable period afterwards however, poses little risk and can be well-tolerated by the elderly and other patients who are not good candidates for other surgical procedures. As with all surgical procedures, there is some risk of scarring, infection and damage to underlying skin and tissue. These risks are generally minimal.

## looking after treatment area

The treatment area may blister within a few hours. Sometimes the blister is clear or may appear to be red or purple in colour due to bleeding. Within a few days a dry crust forms. Usually no special attention is needed during the healing phase. The treated area may be gently washed once or twice a day and should be kept clean. A dressing is optional but is a good idea if the area is subject to trauma. The dry crust usually peels off after 5–10 days on the face or up to 3 weeks on the hand. On the lower leg it may take even longer. Secondary infection is uncommon but signs to watch for are: pain, swelling, pus or redness around the treatment area. Some patients experience pain at the site following treatment. This can usually be eased with aspirin or paracetamol. Consult your doctor if you are concerned.

## final results

After cryotherapy, the skin may appear entirely normal with no sign of the original skin lesion. It may cause a white mark or a scar when freezing has been deep or prolonged. The white mark may fade but can be permanent. The skin lesion may not have disappeared and may require further cryotherapy or some other form of treatment.

Repeat cryotherapy can be preformed after 7–10 days. If the cryotherapy is to the skin overlying a nerve (such as on a finger) there may be some numbness to the area. This nearly always returns within a few weeks or months. Cryotherapy has been shown to have a high success rate in permanently removing skin growths.

## wart prevention

Wart prevention recommendations include:

- Avoid direct contact with another person's wart
- Do not share towels with a person who has warts
- Do not share shoes or socks with someone who has plantar warts
- Do not scratch or pick at a wart, this may encourage it to spread
- Do wear flip-flops in communal showers

## normal results

Some redness, swelling, blistering and oozing of fluid are all common results of cryotherapy. Healing time can vary by the site treated and the cryotherapy technique used. When cryogen is applied directly to the growth, healing may occur in three weeks. Growths treated on the head and neck with the spray technique may take four to six weeks to heal; growths treated on other areas of the body may take considerably longer. Cryotherapy boasts high success rates in permanently removing skin growths; even for malignant lesions such as squamous cell and basal cell cancers, studies have shown a cure rate of up to 98%. For certain types of growths, such as some forms of warts, repeat treatments over several weeks are necessary to prevent the growth's return.