

Patient information

Verrucas

What is a verruca?

Verrucae are plantar warts that commonly occur on the soles of the feet or around the toe area. They are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which is contagious through direct person-to-person contact. There are various forms of HPV, which all relate to various parts of the human body. They usually go away on their own but this may take months and in some case years



What causes verrucae?

The HPV virus is thought to thrive in moist, damp environments such as swimming pools, changing room floors and communal shower areas. It is possible to contract verrucae simply by walking across the same floor area as someone with a verruca, especially if you have any small or invisible cuts or abrasions that make it easier for the virus to penetrate.

Who gets them?

Verrucae are most commonly seen in children, teenagers and young adults - largely those who use communal changing rooms. It is possible to develop an immunity against the virus over time but most people remain susceptible, although some more than others.

How do I know I have them?

The most common appearance is that of a small cauliflower-type growth on the soles of your feet with tiny black dots. If it is painful when you pinch the area (like when you squeeze a spot), you are likely to have a verruca. They can grow to 1cm in diameter and may spread into a cluster of small warts. If you are unsure, seek advice from a podiatrist.

Are they serious?

Verrucae are harmless but can be uncomfortable and painful if they develop on a weight bearing part of the foot. In addition, hard skin (callus) can form over the top of the verruca, increasing the discomfort in this area. There are also some strains of the virus that spread very quickly and can look unsightly.

What are the treatments?

Avoid touching or scratching a verruca as it may spread into a cluster of warts. Instead, cover it up with a plaster. Evidence suggests that, in many cases, verrucae will disappear of their own accord, within six months for children but taking longer for adults (up to two years). This is because the body's immune system recognises the presence of the virus and fights the infection naturally, but it can take many months for this to happen. If it is painless, no treatment may be required as some treatments can be painful, especially for children, and can cause side-effects.

For painful and/or unsightly verrucae or ones that are spreading, you can self-treat using over the counter remedies from the chemist. These treatments can take up to 3 months to complete and may irritate your skin and do not always work.

Sometimes, merely rubbing away the dry skin over a verruca and applying a plaster helps to stimulate the body's immune system to fight the infection. However, if your verruca becomes unusually painful or the surrounding skin area goes red, stop treatment immediately and see a podiatrist. This is because if the healthy tissue around a verruca is damaged, you could hamper further treatment.

NB: East Sussex Health Care NHS Trust is not commissioned to treat Verrucae; this will need to be carried out by a private Chiropodist / Podiatrist (registered with the Health Professions Council), please access The Royal College of Podiatry Website for details of private practitioners in your area. <https://cop.org.uk/find-a-podiatrist#FIND.PODIATRIST>

A podiatrist will assess your general well-being and foot health before deciding on a treatment plan. This may include:

- Acid-based treatments, which are stronger than regular 'over the counter' (OTC) treatments from your local pharmacy
- Cryotherapy, which involves freezing the verruca with liquid nitrogen or nitrous oxide gas
- Electrosurgery, which requires a local anaesthetic to be given
- Excisional surgery, which is similar to the above
- Laser surgery, particularly for larger areas of verrucae.
- Microwave therapy, where the verruca has a microwave pulse sent through it
- Needling, where the entire area of the verruca is pricked with a needle to stimulate the body's immune system.

How can I prevent them?

To avoid catching verrucae, keep your feet in a healthy condition. Always dry them thoroughly after washing and if your feet are sweaty, treat them with surgical spirit; if they are dry, moisturise them with suitable creams or lotions, but avoid applying between the toes.

Other tips include wearing flip-flops in communal areas, not sharing towels, shoes and socks.

For more information

If you require any assistance then please contact
Podiatry services on
0300 1314536

Or email

Esh-tr.podiatryenquiries@nhs.net

Sources of information.

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust <https://www.esht.nhs.uk/service/podiatry/>

The Health and Care Professions Council www.hcpc-uk.org

The Royal College of Podiatry www.cop.uk

NHS choices www.nhs.uk

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 5860 or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net.

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4500 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
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The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Community Health and Integrated Care

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