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Cryotherapy for the skin

Cryotherapy is a method of superfreezing tissue in order to destroy it. This article discusses cryotherapy of the skin.

Description

Cryotherapy is done using a cotton swab that has been dipped into liquid nitrogen or a probe that has liquid nitrogen flowing through it.

The procedure is done in your health care provider's office. It usually takes less than a minute.

The freezing may cause some discomfort. Your provider may apply a numbing medicine to the area first.

Why the Procedure is Performed

Cryotherapy or cryosurgery may be used to:

- Remove warts
- Destroy precancerous skin lesions (actinic keratoses or solar keratoses)

In rare cases, cryotherapy is used to treat some skin cancers. But, skin that is destroyed during cryotherapy cannot be examined under a microscope. A skin biopsy is needed if your provider wants to check the lesion for signs of cancer.

Risks

Cryotherapy risks include:

- Blisters and ulcers, leading to pain and infection
- Scarring, especially if the freezing was prolonged or deeper areas of the skin were affected
- Changes in skin color (skin turns white)

After the Procedure

Cryotherapy works well for many people. Some skin lesions, especially warts, may need to be treated more than once.

Outlook (Prognosis)

The treated area may look red after the procedure. A blister will often form within a few hours. It may appear clear or have a red or purple color.

You may have a little pain for up to 3 days.

Most of the time, no special care is needed during healing. The area should be washed gently once or twice a day and kept clean. A bandage or dressing should only be needed if the area rubs against clothes or may be easily injured.

A scab forms and will usually peel away within 1 to 3 weeks, depending on the area treated.

Call your provider if:

- There are signs of infection such as redness, swelling, or drainage.
- The skin lesion is not gone after it has healed.

Alternative Names

Cryotherapy - skin; Cryosurgery - skin; Warts - freezing; Warts - cryotherapy; Actinic keratosis - cryotherapy; Solar keratosis - cryotherapy

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