



Colon & Rectal Surgery

Anal Warts

What are anal warts?

Anal warts (also called “condyloma acuminata”) are a relatively common and bothersome condition that affects the area around the anus. They also may affect the skin of the genital area.

They first appear as tiny blemishes—perhaps as small as the head of a pin—and may grow larger than the size of a pea. Usually, they do not cause pain or discomfort. As a result, patients may be unaware of the warts.

What causes anal warts?

Their cause is thought to be the human papilloma virus, which is relatively contagious. The virus can be transmitted from person to person, almost always by direct contact.

Do these warts always need to be removed?

Yes. If they are not removed, the warts generally grow larger and become more numerous. In addition, these warts can become cancerous if left untreated for a long time.

What treatments are available?

If warts are very small and are located just on the skin around the anus, they can be treated with medication applied directly to their surface. This method, while relatively simple in concept, must be carried out with great care and precision by a doctor to prevent injury to the normal skin surrounding the warts. This method usually requires several applications performed at various intervals over many weeks.

Another form of treatment involves more rapid destruction of the warts using electrical cautery, surgical removal or a combination of the two. Laser surgery also may be used but has no advantage over other treatments. These procedures provide immediate results but must be performed using either a local anesthetic—such as Novocaine—or a general or spinal anesthetic, depending on the number and location of the warts.

Warts inside the anal canal usually are not suitable for treatment by medication. In most cases, they must be cauterized or removed by surgery.

Do I need to be hospitalized for treatment?

No. Almost always, the cautery and excision technique can take place on an outpatient basis. That way, you can go home after the procedure.

How much time will I lose from work after a cautery treatment?

The answer depends on the individual situation and extent of your warts. Most people are moderately uncomfortable for a few days, and pain medication may be prescribed. Depending on the extent of the disease, some people return to work the next day, while others may remain out of work for several days.

Will a single treatment cure the problem?

Unfortunately, it will not in most cases. Even with the cautery and surgical treatments that immediately destroy existing warts, many patients will develop new warts. That’s because viruses that cause the warts can live concealed in tissues that appear normal for 6 months or longer before another wart develops. New warts often develop from the virus that already was present in the tissue, but these are not recurrences of warts previously treated.

Most new warts that develop can be treated in the doctor’s office, using either a chemical solution, excision or the electrical cautery procedure. These treatments are performed every few weeks at first, then less frequently as new warts become smaller and less numerous.

Sometimes, new warts develop so rapidly that office treatment is impractical. In these situations, a second and occasionally third outpatient surgical visit may be needed.

How long must I continue treatment?

Follow-up visits are necessary for some months after the last wart is observed to be certain that no more warts occur from viruses living in the cells of skin.

What can I do to avoid getting warts again?

In some cases, warts may recur repeatedly after successful removal because the virus that causes the warts lies

dormant in body tissues. Here are some tips to avoid recurrence and reinfection:

- Continue checking for several months after the last wart has been spotted to improve the chances that both the warts and the underlying virus that causes them are gone.
- Do not have sexual contact with individuals who have anal (or genital) warts. Many people are unaware that they have this condition, so sexual abstinence or limiting sexual contact to marriage relationships will reduce your potential exposure to the contagious virus that causes these warts. As a precaution, sexual partners ought to be checked for this disorder, even if they exhibit no symptoms.

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