

Anal Warts

What are anal warts?

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

Where do these warts come from?

They are caused by a virus which usually is transmitted from person to person through sexual contact. However, they can also be acquired through other means.

Do these warts always need to be removed?

Yes. If this is not done, the warts generally grow larger and more numerous. There is evidence that these warts can become cancerous if untreated.

What treatments are available?

If the warts are very small and are located **only** on skin around the anus, they can be treated with certain caustic liquid medicines which must be applied directly to the surface of the warts. Though relatively simple in concept, this treatment must be carried out with great care and precision, or there is a chance of injuring the normal skin around the warts. This method usually takes several applications, which are performed over several weeks. When warts are larger, more numerous or located inside the anus, chemical therapy generally is ineffective. Another form of treatment involves rapid destruction of the warts through electric cautery, surgical removal, or a combination of the two. This gives immediate results, but requires anesthesia that varies from simple local injections to general anesthesia, depending on the number and location of the warts being treated.

Must I be hospitalized for surgical treatment?

No. The cautery and excision technique can be done as an outpatient procedure, and you can go home an hour or two after it is complete.

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

This depends upon the individual. Most people are moderately uncomfortable for a few days after the treatment. Some people return to work the next day, while some may be out for up to several days.

Will a single treatment cure the problem?

Even with the cauterization and surgical treatment, almost all people develop more warts after treatment. The virus can live in normal-appearing tissue for up to six months **before** causing a wart to develop. If warts do recur, they are thought to be **new** warts developing from the virus which was already in the tissue. As new warts develop, they usually can be treated in the office, using either acid or the electric cauterization. These treatments are performed about once a month, initially. As the new warts become less numerous and smaller, treatment decreases to every two months. Sometimes the new warts develop so rapidly that office treatments would be quite uncomfortable. In such situations, a second, and occasionally a third visit to day surgery is recommended. If this is necessary, the discomfort associated with recovery is typically milder than it is after the initial procedure.

How often is follow-up treatment necessary?

Follow-up visits are necessary at various intervals, until six months after the last wart is seen. This is to ensure that no more warts develop from the virus that is present in the healthy-appearing skin.

What can be done to avoid getting these warts again?

It is important to avoid re-infection by other individuals who may have this condition. Sexual partners should be examined by their physician.