

CRYOTHERAPY

How does cryotherapy (freezing) work?

Freezing has been used as a method of treatment for skin problems for many years. It is particularly effective for treating skin lesions that involve the surface layers of the skin (the epidermis). Damage to this layer allows the skin cells underneath (the basal cell layer) to regenerate and produce normal healthy skin.

What type of skin problems are treated with cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy is commonly used to treat sun-damaged skin lesions (solar keratosis), warty growths of the skin (seborrhoeic warts), viral warts (verrucae) and early forms of skin cancer (intra-epidermal carcinoma or Bowen's disease).

What will I experience during treatment?

The treatment will normally produce soreness and a stinging sensation. Occasionally, it will be painful. This will depend on the site of the skin problem and the length of the freeze considered necessary by the doctor or nurse.

What should I expect after treatment?

It is normal to experience some discomfort following cryotherapy. Immediately after treatment, marked redness and swelling may develop. A scab or crust may then form, which will eventually fall off leaving normal skin underneath. This process may take several days and you may want to cover the area with a plaster. It is important to keep the area clean during this healing phase. Vaseline can be used if you decide to leave it uncovered. Occasionally, the doctor may prescribe Fucibet cream to settle down the inflammation and this should be used twice daily for 5-7 days.

What problems may occur?

The following may also complicate the treatment:

- **PAIN**

Undue discomfort or pain will normally respond to aspirin (adults only) or paracetamol. This will also help to limit the swelling.

- **BLISTER FORMATION**

Sometimes freezing on sensitive skin will produce a clear water or blood blister. If this occurs, simply puncture the roof of the blister with a clean needle (preferably sterilised by placing it in boiling water) and let out any fluid. Repeat this until it no longer refills.

- **INFECTION**

Increasing pain and redness occurring a few days after treatment may indicate infection. If this occurs you may need to see your general practitioner for a prescription for antibiotic cream (Fucibet) or tablets (Flucloxacillin, if not penicillin allergic)

- **SCAR**

Sometimes it is necessary to produce a scar to adequately treat skin lesions. With cryotherapy these tend to be white in colour and occasionally they are depressed in the skin. Rarely, a raised keloid or hypertrophic scar may form. Treatment may also disturb the colouration of the skin layers producing loss of normal colouration (hypopigmentation) or increased darkness (hyperpigmentation).