

Can You Kill Warts With Duct Tape?

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Common warts are benign skin growths triggered by an infection with human papillomavirus (HPV), affecting up to 20% of the population. Most notably the prevalence is higher in children than adults
- › After exposure, it can take up to six months for a wart to develop and most disappear without treatment. However, data show that if you want to remove warts, duct tape is an effective, inexpensive and painless method that does not leave scar tissue
- › Two studies demonstrated duct tape removed 80% to 85% of the participant's warts as compared to 60% of those who received cryotherapy
- › Other conventional removal methods include prescription strength acid, minor surgery and laser treatment, each of which is painful and typically leaves a scar. Other at-home treatments that are not painful and don't leave a scar include garlic, banana peel, pineapple juice and aloe vera

There are several different types of warts, but most are benign skin growths that affect up to 20% of the population.¹ Although they're common, the prevalence in school children is higher than in adults and they are more common in immunosuppressed patients and those who handle meat.

While they can occur at any age, they're rare during infancy and the prevalence peaks in school age children at roughly 16 years. Traditional medicine practitioners and Western medicine doctors have looked at several ways of eliminating this skin growth from their

patients. It turns out that you may have the best chance of success treating skin warts at home with duct tape.

What Are Warts?

Before we talk about how they're removed, let's talk about what they are. Warts are caused by a viral infection along the top layer of the skin, most generally from human papillomavirus (HPV).² Currently, well over 100 types of HPV have been identified but only some of those tend to infect the skin after direct or indirect contact with an infected person.

Your risk of infection rises when there is a break in the skin or a disruption to the epithelial barrier. There are several common wart infections, including the common wart, genital wart, flat wart and deep palmoplantar warts. Treatment can be difficult because warts frequently recur, and yet sometimes they resolve spontaneously within a few years.

There are a small number of HPV subtype infections that are associated with the development of malignancies, but those don't cause the common wart growth you find on your hands, fingers and other areas of the body that are commonly touched. The common wart has a rough texture and usually has small black dots in the center, which are clotted blood vessels.

After exposure, it can take up to six months for a wart to develop and although they often disappear on their own, many people choose to have them removed because they can be embarrassing.³ You can reduce your risk of developing warts by avoiding direct contact with them, including warts on your own body.

If you pick at a wart, it tends to spread the virus. Warts tend to appear in areas of the skin that have been broken, so biting your fingernails or nibbling the skin around the nails increases your risk.

Does Duct Tape Kill Warts?

There are case studies and credible examples of home remedies that can help remove the common wart. But as Dr. Michael Greger, founder of NutritionFacts.org, notes, many things can be attributed to curing warts because most go away on their own.⁴

He notes one study that followed 1,000 children for two years during which the researchers found that two-thirds of the warts disappeared without any treatment, suggesting that the best treatment may be to leave them alone unless treatment is warranted.

It is assumed that spontaneous healing is associated with an immune response in the body. This is based on studies where a wart was injected with a vaccine or a placebo. In this study, Greger notes that the vaccine appeared to accelerate the immune process and cleared the wart. The problem is that injections hurt and 30% of the children who had their warts injected with the vaccine developed a flu-like syndrome.⁵

Multiple studies have demonstrated that a placebo effect on warts can cure approximately one-quarter of the cases and traditional medical therapies can resolve approximately 50% of the warts. For duct tape to be considered efficacious, it would have to cure at least as many as conventional treatments.

One group of researchers⁶ tested duct tape against cryotherapy to treat common warts in 51 children and young adults ages 3 to 22 years. The participants were randomized and 26 were treated with duct tape and 25 with liquid nitrogen for 10 seconds every 2 to 3 weeks for a maximum of six treatments. The data revealed that 85% of the participants using duct tape were cured while 60% of the participants using cryotherapy had complete resolution.

In other words, the duct tape worked far better than the current medical treatment. As Gregor notes,⁷ the researchers observed the only adverse effect from the duct tape was a minimal amount of local irritation. Yet cryotherapy is painful, causes bloody blisters that can get infected and one young child vomited before each cryotherapy session in fear of the pain.

What's the Best Type of Duct Tape for Wart Removal

Further studies tried to replicate the results. A 2007 paper⁸ analyzed the cost-effectiveness of several treatments for warts and found that duct tape was the most cost-effective but “published evidence of its effectiveness is sparse. Duct tape could be adopted as the primary treatment for cutaneous warts if its effectiveness is verified by further rigorous trials.”⁹

Greger discussed¹⁰ the results of a second 2007 study¹¹ that looked at the treatment of common warts in adults using duct tape in a double-blind, randomized controlled trial. In this study, the researchers engaged 90 immunocompetent adults who had at least one wart and randomized them to either be treated with moleskin with transparent duct tape or moleskin alone.

They found no statistically significant differences in the two groups for the treatment of warts in the adult population. To determine whether the difference was the age of the participants, Greger describes another study in which 100 school children were randomized to receive treatment with duct tape or a corn pad. In this study the researchers did the same thing, applying clear duct tape, and they got the same results – the duct tape failed.

At that point, the question of whether duct tape could help treat the common wart was dropped as ineffective since follow-up studies had demonstrated different results than the original study using a larger number of participants.

However, since duct tape appeared to be working clinically, could the difference be in the type of duct tape that was used and not in the age difference of the participants? Greger quotes from a 2011 paper¹² published in the British Journal of Dermatology titled “Clear Duct Tape is Not Duct Tape,” in which the author postulated:

“[C]lear duct tape and moleskin both contain an acrylic-based adhesive, whereas standard silver duct tape contains a totally different rubber-based adhesive ... It is likely that the success of traditional duct tape is associated with the ... adhesive that comes in direct contact with the wart during treatment.”

In fact, another later study¹³ published in 2016 engaged 60 immunocompetent participants and after two months demonstrated that duct tape adhered with cyanoacrylate (Super Glue) resolved 80% of the warts as compared to 60% that resolved in participants who received cryotherapy.

Quoting from a 2005 Mayo Clinic Health Letter,¹⁴ Greger reads the first line of the answer to a question posed by a grandmother whose 14-year-old grandson was embarrassed by the warts on his hand. “Odd as it may sound, duct tape is a legitimate and often effective treatment for common warts.”

Conventional Treatments for Warts

Duct tape is unconventional and inexpensive, both of which are not typically well-accepted in Western medicine. Following the 2002 study that initially demonstrated duct tape could effectively remove the common wart in 80% of the participants, Greger shared some of the public physician comments. Some said they had used duct tape for decades, while others were not happy, writing that the information “could damage the reputation of cryosurgery for this indication.”¹⁵

Another objection was that the 10-second application is only useful on very thin lesions and in order to remove warts the cryotherapy “should elicit a vesicular reaction that will separate the papilloma from the underlying skin and, yes, this hurts.”¹⁶

Finally, Greger notes that Dr. William Abramovitz from Baylor University Medical Center went on to make light of the child who vomited out of fear before each application, writing that “Maybe the child who vomited prior to each application figured out the unintended conclusions of the design of this study.”¹⁷

Cryotherapy is just one of the recommended treatments for common warts. Mayo Clinic¹⁸ lists others in current use, including prescription-strength salicylic acid and other acids, such as trichloroacetic acid to remove the wart one layer at a time. These acid treatments are done in the office where the doctor first shaves off the surface of the

wart and then applies the acid with a wooden toothpick. This requires repeated painful treatments every week or two.

Other options include minor surgery that can leave a scar and laser treatment to cauterize or burn the blood vessels that feed the infected tissue. This causes the wart to eventually die. However, research evidence supporting the effectiveness of laser treatment is limited; in addition to this, the treatment is painful and typically leaves a scar.

Mayo Clinic¹⁹ notes that one of the goals of treatment is to stimulate the immune system to fight the virus. They write that non-prescription strength at-home acid and freezing treatments may be effective – unless you have an impaired immune system or diabetes.

Other Effective Home Remedies for Warts

Common warts can go away on their own, especially in children. However, there are several ways to [get rid of them at home](#), including duct tape, depending on your healthcare provider's advice. It's important to remember that these applications are for common warts and not those that you may find on your face or genitals. In these cases, seek medical advice to avoid complications.

Duct tape – Mayo Clinic²⁰ recommends covering the wart completely with standard duct tape for six days. Soak it in water and gently remove the dead tissue with a disposable emery board. Leave it exposed for 12 hours and then repeat the process until the wart has disappeared.

Salicylic acid – This product comes in patches, ointments and pads to help remove layers of the wart.²¹ Before application, immerse your wart in warm water and file dead skin with a disposable emery board. Salicylic acid may not kill the virus causing the wart, however, and it may return.

Garlic – Antiviral properties in garlic may help fight the virus and support your immune system. Apply the garlic to your warts but do not leave it in contact with your skin overnight, since this may cause a burn.²²

Banana peel – The inside of a banana peel may be placed in direct contact with the wart and taped in place for a few days. Remove it and replace it with a new banana peel until the wart disappears, which may take up to three weeks.²³

Pineapple juice – Apply the juice directly to the wart on a cotton ball or put a small slice of pineapple on the wart and cover it with a bandage for three to five minutes. Repeat two to three times a day.²⁴

Aloe vera – Dab a cotton ball with aloe vera gel and place it in contact with the wart, taping it in place to leave it on for a few days. Reapply every aloe vera every few hours.²⁵

Sources and References

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