

# What to expect after having cryotherapy

(freezing with liquid nitrogen)



## Information for patients

Dermatology



**PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



## **Why have I been given this leaflet?**

You have been given this leaflet to help you understand more about cryotherapy - what it is, how it is done, and what the potential side effects are.

## **What is cryotherapy?**

Cryotherapy is a treatment which uses a chemical called liquid nitrogen to destroy a number of skin lesions. These include seborrhoeic warts, viral warts and actinic keratoses (sunlight damage).

## **How is it performed?**

The liquid nitrogen is sprayed directly onto the lesion until the lesion, and a small rim around it, turns white. The procedure usually takes between 10 - 20 seconds, although this does depend on the thickness and size of the lesion.

## **Are there any side effects?**

### **Immediate side effects**

#### **Pain**

9 out of 10 people (90%) will feel some stinging or burning during the procedure. This may continue until the area thaws (1-2 minutes) but should settle down within a few minutes. However, some patients experience discomfort for up to an hour. If you experience mild pain after your treatment, painkillers (such as paracetamol) are recommended.

#### **Swelling and redness**

Swelling and redness are a normal response to freezing the skin. This will usually settle after a few days.

## **Blistering**

Blistering is a common side effect of cryotherapy. The blister usually settles after a few days as the scab forms. Occasionally the blisters become filled with blood (blood blisters). If this happens, don't worry. Protect the blister with a small, adhesive dressing. If a large blister develops, let the fluid out by popping the blister with a sterile needle. Repeat this, until the blister no longer fills with fluid. Apply an antiseptic cream, such as Savlon™, twice a day.

## **Crusting**

You may find that a crust develops over the area which has been treated. This will usually peel or drop off within 2 weeks. You may develop another crust after this, but this too will heal.

## **Infection**

Very rarely do people develop infection after cryotherapy.

## **Subsequent side effects**

### **Colour changes**

When new skin grows back at and around the treatment site, it may be lighter or darker than the surrounding skin, especially in dark skinned people. This may be permanent.

### **Scarring**

If you have only had a light freezing, it is unlikely that a scar will form. If you have had a longer freeze, for example to treat a larger or deeper lesion, then you may have some scarring. However, scarring from cryotherapy is usually less than you would get from other forms of treatment.

## **Will I need to come back to hospital?**

Your consultant will decide if you need to come back to hospital for further treatment.

## Is there anything I should look out for?

It is normal to experience some mild pain after the procedure, however you should watch out for:

- increasing pain at the wound site
- redness
- swelling
- discharge from the wound

If you experience these symptoms it may be a sign of infection.

## Who do I contact if I have any concerns?

If your treatment site becomes very painful, inflamed or infected, please contact the Dermatology Helpline on **0114 271 2018**.

This is a 24 hour answering machine, which is checked several times a day (Mon - Fri, 8.00am - 4.30pm).

**Out of hours:** Please use the emergency GP services, Minor Injuries Unit or Accident and Emergency Department. They will be able to contact the Dermatology on-call service for advice.

## Where can I find more information on cryotherapy?

Further information about cryotherapy can be found on the following website:

**[www.dermnetnz.org/procedures/cryotherapy.html](http://www.dermnetnz.org/procedures/cryotherapy.html)**

Alternative formats can be available on request.

Please email: **[sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net)**

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