

Oxford University Hospitals **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Department of Dermatology  
Churchill Hospital

# Cryotherapy

Information for patients



## What is cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy is a treatment which uses a chemical called liquid nitrogen to destroy a number of skin lesions, including viral warts, seborrhoeic warts and solar keratoses. Liquid nitrogen is extremely cold and freezes and destroys the lesion.

## How is it carried out?

The liquid nitrogen is sprayed onto the lesion until the lesion and a small rim around it turns white. For most lesions a 5 - 10 second freeze will be enough. Sometimes the treatment may need to be repeated or carried out for longer.

## Looking after the treated area

Treatment is likely to produce a reaction similar to a burn, with redness, leaking fluid or crusting lasting a few days. You do not need to cover the treated area with a dressing and you do not need to keep it dry. Simply treat it gently, as it may be slightly sore. If you do feel that you need to take a painkiller you can take paracetamol or other pain relieving tablets.

After the treatment a blister (sometimes a 'blood blister') may develop. If this happens, don't worry. Protect the blister with a clean, dry dressing. If a large blister forms, please seek advice from your GP or Practice Nurse. A simple antiseptic cream such as Savlon™ may be used if the blister bursts. The blisters will form scabs that will fall off after about 2 - 3 weeks.

Sometimes swelling may develop in the surrounding skin, particularly if you have an area around your eyes treated. If this

happens, you may want to take an anti-inflammatory painkiller such as ibuprofen. The doctor may sometimes prescribe a steroid ointment, to be applied to the treatment site to reduce swelling.

The healing process may take up to 6 weeks, but some areas that are treated may take longer.

## Risks and side effects

Cryotherapy is a safe and reliable treatment and the appearance of the skin afterwards is usually very good. However, once the area has healed you may be left with a pale mark or a flat white scar. Sometimes lesions redevelop after treatment with cryotherapy. If this happens, please speak to your GP, as they may be able to recommend further cryotherapy or alternative treatments.

## When to contact us

If you have severe pain or swelling that does not respond to simple painkillers or anti-inflammatory painkillers, or you are concerned about infection, please call the Dermatology Department:

Tel: **01865 228 212 or 228 241 or 228 225**

(9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday)

At all other times please contact the On-call Dermatologist through the Churchill Hospital switchboard:

Tel: **01865 741 841**

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **[PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk)**

Authors: Dr Jonathan Bowling and Dr Matthew Lin  
December 2015  
Review: December 2018  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
Oxford OX3 9DU  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)

