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Plantar Wart (Verruca Plantaris)

What is a Plantar Wart?

A wart is a small growth on the skin that develops when the skin is infected by a virus. Warts can develop anywhere on the foot, but typically they appear on the bottom (plantar side) of the foot. Plantar warts most commonly occur in children, adolescents, and the elderly. Plantar warts grow deep into the skin. Usually this growth occurs slowly—the wart starts off small and gets larger over time.

There are two types of plantar warts:

- A *solitary* wart is a single wart. It often increases in size and may eventually multiply, forming additional “satellite” warts.
- *Mosaic* warts are a cluster of several small warts growing closely together in one area. Mosaic warts are more difficult to treat than solitary warts.

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of a plantar wart may include:

- **Thickened skin.** Often a plantar wart resembles a callus because of its tough, thick tissue.
- **Pain.** A plantar wart usually hurts during walking and standing, and there is pain when the sides of the wart are squeezed.
- **Tiny black dots.** These often appear on the surface of the wart. The dots are actually dried blood contained in the infected capillaries (tiny blood vessels).

What Causes a Plantar Wart?

Plantar warts are caused by direct contact with the human papilloma virus (HPV). This is the same virus that causes warts on other areas of the body. Typically, the plantar wart virus is acquired in public places where people go barefoot, such as locker rooms, swimming pools, and karate classes. It can also be acquired at home if other family members have the virus.

Diagnosis and Treatment

To diagnose a plantar wart, the foot and ankle surgeon will examine the patient’s foot and look for signs and symptoms of a wart.

Although plantar warts may eventually clear up on their own, most patients desire faster relief. The goal of treatment is to completely remove the wart.

The foot and ankle surgeon may use topical or oral treatments, laser therapy, cryotherapy (freezing), or surgery to remove the wart.

Regardless of the treatment approaches undertaken, it is important that the patient follow the surgeon's instructions, including all home care and medication that has been prescribed, as well as follow-up visits with the surgeon. Warts may return, requiring further treatment.

If there is no response to treatment, further diagnostic evaluation may be necessary. In such cases, the surgeon can perform a biopsy to rule out other potential causes for the growth.

Although there are many folk remedies for warts, patients should be aware that these remain unproven and may be dangerous. Patients should never try to remove a wart themselves—this can do more harm than good.