

Advice following Cryotherapy

Information and advice for patients after treatment with cryotherapy

Dermatology

What is cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy treatment is a carefully controlled freezing method which uses a substance called liquid nitrogen. This is sprayed through a nozzle from a canister to form a very cold mist which will freeze the targeted lesion identified by your doctor.

Cryotherapy can be used to treat a variety of benign lesions and superficial basal cell carcinomas.

What does the procedure involve?

The liquid nitrogen is usually sprayed for about 10 to 20 seconds until the lesion freezes and turns white; you may require a second freeze cycle depending on the size and type of lesion. It feels cold, but most people find the discomfort quite bearable.

The benefits of cryotherapy:

- Cryotherapy is a quick and simple treatment option that can be done during the clinic appointment.
- Successful treatment may mean no further treatment or surgery is required.

Aftercare

The area may become red, and a blister may develop within 24 hours. Ideally the area that has been treated should be kept dry but do not worry if it does get wet – just pat it dry gently with a clean towel.

It usually takes 4 weeks for the full effect of liquid nitrogen treatment to be apparent.

If anything remains after 4 weeks further treatment may be necessary, speak to your GP about this.

Once healed you may use an unperfumed cream, to massage the area.

What are the side effects of cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy is a safe and reliable treatment, and the cosmetic result is usually very good. The initial side effects include:

- **Pain** – cryotherapy is usually well-tolerated but can sometimes be painful if a deep freeze has been necessary. Painkillers (such as paracetamol) taken for the first 24 hours may relieve the discomfort.
- **Swelling and redness** – this is a normal immediate response to freezing the skin and usually settles after two to three days. For a short while the treated area may ooze a little watery fluid. Cryotherapy close to the eyes may induce prominent puffiness of the lower eyelids which settles within days.
- **Blistering** – this is also common, and blisters settle after a few days as the scab forms. Some people blister more easily than others. Occasionally the blisters may become filled with blood; this is harmless. Blisters should only be punctured after seeking medical advice.
- **Infection** – uncommonly, infection can occur, resulting in increased pain and pus: this may require an antiseptic cream or oral antibiotic therapy from the healthcare practitioner who performed the treatment, or your GP.

Subsequent side effects:

- **Scarring** – rarely, a scar may form. You may be left with a pale mark or a flat white scar, regardless of your skin colour.
- **Hypertrophic/Keloid scarring** – very rarely a raised scar can form following treatment with cryotherapy which appears as a rounded, hard growth on the skin. These are harmless lesions, more common in darker skinned individuals.
- **Pigmentation changes** – the skin at and around the treatment site may lighten or darken in colour, especially in darker-skinned people. This usually improves with time but may be permanent.
- **Numbness** – if a superficial nerve is frozen, it may result in numbness of the area of skin supplied by that nerve. Normal feeling usually returns within a matter of months.
- **Recurrence** – treatment may fail, or the growth may recur. You might need a repeat treatment or a different treatment.

The doctor treating you will be happy to discuss these risks further.

Symptoms to report

In some people a blister may develop within 24 hours, if there is a large blood-filled blister, burst the blister with a sterile needle. Sterilise the needle in hot water or in the steam of a boiling kettle. Expel the fluid from the blister and leave exposed to the air.

If the area becomes:

- Increasingly red and swollen after 48 hours
- Increasingly painful and tender after 48 hours.
- Discharge appears after 24 hours.

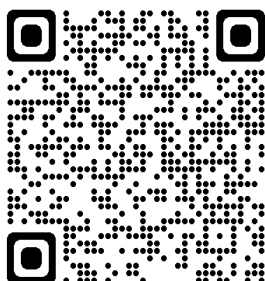
Please contact your GP as it is possible the area has become infected and may need further treatment.

Contact details

If you are in any doubt or are worried, please contact the dermatology department between 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday on 0121 507 6620.

Further information

For more information go to www.bad.org.uk/pils/cryotherapy or scan the QR code below.



Sources used for the information in this leaflet

British Association of Dermatologists (2022). Cryotherapy. [Online] Available at: <https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/cryotherapy/> (Accessed 16 May 2024).

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