

What is cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy (or cryosurgery) refers to a **freezing treatment** of the skin with a very cold liquid (liquid nitrogen); in effect, the treatment is a very carefully controlled freeze burn. Cryotherapy can be used to treat a number of different skin conditions e.g. sun-damaged areas of skin (e.g. actinic/solar keratosis) as well as some warts.

What does the procedure involve?

Cryotherapy can be **sprayed or touched onto any area of skin** that needs treatment; for some conditions, more than one treatment is needed. The advantage of this treatment is that it replaces the need for a surgical operation, however the skin lesion may recur.

What will I feel during the procedure?

You will feel a **burning sensation**, if the treatment is too uncomfortable you must ask the healthcare professional to stop treatment. The level of discomfort depends on the length of the freeze and the area being treated.

After the procedure the skin may look red, swell, or blister. It can be sore for a few days; you can take simple pain relief if needed. After a few days a scab may form, which may take a few weeks to fall off depending on the site (occasionally a little longer, especially on the legs where healing is slow).

How should the treated area be cared for?

Aim to keep the treated areas dry for 24 hours. After this time the area should be **gently washed on a daily basis** and patted dry with a soft towel or tissue. Vaseline ® can be applied daily to help the area heal and prevent crusting - it is important to use a fresh tub of Vaseline ®.

A dressing or plaster is not usually necessary but may be advisable if the treated area is likely to be knocked or rubbed by clothing.

Blisters are common and may sometimes become filled with blood. Blisters can either be left intact or burst, if you plan to burst the blister it is important to clean the surface of the skin beforehand and then use a sterile needle.

What are the side effects of cryotherapy?

- **Skin colour change** – you may be left with a pale mark, a flat white scar, or the skin may darken. Such changes may take many months to resolve, or may persist
- **A keloid (thicker scar)** may develop, this is more likely in people with darker skin
- **Leg ulcers** – if used on the lower leg there is an increased risk of a leg ulcer
- **Nail damage** – if the treatment is used near the bottom of the nail (nail fold) it can cause nail damage, which sometimes can persist
- **Infection** – may result in increased pain and pus. This may require an antiseptic cream or oral antibiotic therapy from a healthcare professional
- **Numbness** – the treated area may feel a little numb; this may take months to settle