

Cryotherapy

Information for patients



Cryotherapy (cryosurgery) is the use of cold, freezing temperatures for therapeutic purposes.

Cryotherapy can be used to treat or remove superficial skin lesions, avoiding the need for surgery.

The doctor or nurse applies liquid nitrogen (-196°C) from a vacuum flask with a spray nozzle. This spray cools and destroys superficial layers of skin. Sometimes, the liquid nitrogen may be applied using a cotton wool bud. The treatment only takes a few seconds, then the skin is allowed to warm up.

Repeated treatments may be required.

Will it hurt?

Liquid nitrogen is very cold, so it will numb your skin. You may feel a burning sensation or a stinging pain for a short time. During the warming up period the skin may tingle which may then be followed by a dull ache for 2-3 hours. Simple painkillers such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen may be used.

What will happen next?

There will be some swelling and a blister may form. A crust on the treated lesion may simply drop off without any noticeable change after a week or two. Following severe skin inflammation the healing can take up to six weeks.

What are the side-effects?

Cryotherapy can be painful. You may develop redness, swelling or a blister. As with any other surgical procedure there is a small risk of a wound infection.

Once the wound has healed, you may be left with a small scar which often looks like a chicken pox mark. The treated skin may initially be darker (post inflammatory hyperpigmentation) or lighter than the surrounding skin. This change of pigment may be permanent.

What kind of wound care will I need?

Immediately after treatment no dressing is required unless to protect the treated area from rubbing by clothing. You can wash and bathe your skin as usual, but should avoid scrubbing the treated area.

If a blister forms, this should be left intact if possible. If the blister is tense and painful the fluid can be released with a sterile needle and a dry dressing (plaster) applied. Any crust that forms should be allowed to drop off by itself.

If there is any discharge from the wound, or you experience worsening pain after 48 hours, you may have developed a wound infection. Please contact your GP as you may need some antibiotic or antiseptic ointment.

If you have any worries or concerns, please contact the Leeds Centre for Dermatology:

Monday-Friday, 8.30am-5.00pm, Tel: 0113 392 4292

After 5.00pm and weekends, Tel: 0113 392 4202

You can also contact your own doctor.



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