

Warts

When I am speaking to a group, I always ask if anyone knows about rubbing a wart with a white potato to get rid of it. Generally there are a few hands raised, and invariably someone volunteers that the potato must be buried first to be effective.

I smile to myself when I hear this because I remember recommending the remedy to one mother. Although several people had told me about this cure, I had never gotten the details. When she asked what to do with the potato, I quickly speculated that the vitamin C must play a role in the healing and told her to rub the cut side on the wart.

When she called back several weeks later, she told me that the wart fell off but that it didn't start to dry up until she buried the potato. When I asked her about this, she said that she had mentioned the remedy to her aunt, who had confirmed it but had added that the potato had to be buried. So, the potato was buried in the backyard and the wart dried up. Do I think that burying the potato in the backyard had any effect on the wart? No. The wart probably started drying up on its own, but because this was a family belief, she attributed the healing to the buried potato.

Other remedies for warts abound. Although it seems like there's not much that hasn't been tried to treat warts, the suggestions fall into two groups: Remedies from the medicine cabinet and from the kitchen.

From the Medicine Cabinet:

► **Aspirin.** Oh my aching...wart? Dissolve a regular aspirin in a few drops of water and apply to the wart, then cover with a bandage. Repeat twice daily. If the skin around the wart becomes irritated, use a cotton swab to coat the area with petroleum jelly before applying the solution. Many over-the-counter wart treatments contain salicylic acid—aspirin—as the active ingredient. Do not use this treatment if the child has a history of aspirin sensitivity.

► **Castor oil.** Using it topically is better tolerated than having to swallow it. Once in the morning and again in the evening, apply castor oil to the wart and rub it twenty times with your finger. The wart should disappear in 3-4 weeks. Alternatively, apply a half-drop of castor oil to the wart twice daily and cover it with first-aid tape or a bandage. Keep the bandage on around the clock for 3 weeks, removing it only to bathe and replacing it with a fresh bandage.

► **First-aid tape.** If you can't get rid of it, hide it. Cover the wart with any kind of first-aid tape or bandage. Keep this on 24 hours a day for 3 weeks, removing it only to bathe and replacing it with a fresh piece. Not only does this prevent irritation of the wart while waiting for resolution, the wart is gone from sight.

► **Aloe vera gel.** This remedy goes beyond treating sunburn. Megan's mom recommended soaking a small piece of cotton in aloe gel and taping it over the wart, adding more gel every few hours. Change the cotton daily. Within a few days you can see the wart start to dry up, and in a few weeks the wart may actually disappear.

► **Vitamins A and E.** Take the alphabet approach. In the morning, crush a vitamin A capsule and mix it with enough water to make a paste. Apply directly to the wart. In the afternoon, apply a drop of castor oil; in the evening, apply a drop of lemon juice. Don't like vitamin A? Use vitamin E by breaking open a 100-IU capsule and applying the contents to a bandage. Cover the wart.

► **Thuja extract.** Thuja to the rescue. Apply a drop of thuja tincture—an herbal remedy—directly on the wart. You also can mix a few drops of tincture with a few drops of castor oil and tea tree oil, and apply that to the wart.

From the Kitchen:

► **Onions.** Good for the warts, not so good for the eyes. If you don't mind the tears, cut an onion in half and scoop out the middle. Put in ½ teaspoon of salt. In a few hours, the salt will draw out the onion's juices. Apply the juice to the wart several times a day.

► **Banana peel.** Don't throw that peel away: Apply the pulp side of a small piece of banana peel to the wart and tape securely. Replace the peel daily. This may take some time to work, but it seems effective, even on stubborn plantar warts. Some sources have suggested using the peel of an unripe banana because certain healing compounds are more concentrated in the peels before fruit ripens. A dermatologist colleague once told me that health care providers in tropical locales routinely include bananas in the treatment regimen for warts.

► **Dandelion juice.** Try this wart cure and lawn-care trick combined. The bane of many suburban lawns, the lowly dandelion works on warts. Break open the stem of a dandelion and rub the milky sap on the wart in a circular motion. Repeat 2-3 times a day until the wart disappears. Hey, it was good enough for Grandpa Walton (actor Will Greer). Just don't use dandelions that have been sprayed with pesticides.

► **Miscellaneous.** Wondering what else is in the kitchen that can be used to treat warts? Try everything but the kitchen sink. There's cut garlic clove, fresh pineapple slices, raw potato peelings, radish, lemon juice, and green papaya juice: The latter is a secret of Elmer's mama from Barbados.

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While the remedies presented in this column are not intended to replace conventional therapies, pediatricians should be aware that parents and patients often use home remedies and are sometimes reluctant to discuss them unless they feel that the physician is receptive to hearing them in a nonjudgmental manner. Dr. Beard—a board-certified, traditionally trained pediatrician—highlights many of the most common and benign of these in her book "Salt in Your Sock and Other Tried-and-True Home Remedies" (New York, Three Rivers Press/Random House, 2003).



BY LILLIAN M. BEARD, M.D.