Dear Concerned,

Warts can be worrisome, so it's understandable that you're anxious about getting touchy-feely on your upcoming date. The chance of catching your beau's warts is pretty slim, but you may feel better if you talk with him about your concern.

Warts are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). Altogether, there are over 100 different strains of this virus. Over thirty of these types cause genital warts. Other strains of HPV lead to common warts, which tend to pop up on the hands and fingers. Since common warts and genital warts are caused by different types of HPV, a wart on the hand won't infect the genital area and vice versa. Common warts are spread by direct contact with an infected person or by touching an object like a towel or razor that's been used by an infected person. Genital warts are fairly contagious, but the chance of getting common warts from your date is small.

If you're still uneasy about your date's warts, it may be helpful to talk with him about your worries. For example, you might say something like "I'm looking forward to a rub-down after working out, but I noticed you have some warts on your hands." From there, you have a couple options. You could forgo the back rub and suggest time in the sauna instead. Alternately, you could ask him to don a pair of gloves or you could simply wear a t-shirt to minimize any skin-to-skin contact during the massage. Lastly, you might gently suggest that he try one of these wart removal techniques:

- **Salicylic acid.** Patches and solutions containing this chemical are available over the counter. Look for a product with 17 percent salicylic acid. For best results, apply the medication after a shower or first soak the wart in warm water. The rough skin should
peel off after a few daily applications. The medication can damage healthy skin around the wart, so be careful not to overdo it.

- **Freezing (cryotherapy or liquid nitrogen therapy).** A health care provider "freezes" the wart with liquid nitrogen. A blister will surround wart, and in about a week the whole lot will slough off.

- **Cantharidin.** A health care provider applies cantharidin, a substance extracted from the blister beetle, on the wart. Similar to freezing, a blister appears, lifting the wart off the skin. The blister can be painful, and you'll have to return to your provider so s/he can remove the wart.

- **Minor surgery.** A provider will give you a shot of local anesthetic to numb the area, and then cut away the wart. You may develop a scar, so surgery is usually reserved for warts that haven't responded to other therapies.

- **Laser surgery.** This procedure can be pricey, and it may leave a scar. Laser surgery is generally used as a last resort for stubborn warts.

- **Duct tape.** It may sound crazy, but sticking a strip of duct tape on the offending wart may be more effective than some other treatments. Duct tape seems to aggravate the wart and surrounding skin, triggering an immune response. Note, it may take quite an extended period of continuous duct tape coverage for a wart to disappear.

List adapted from the article Common Warts [2] from the Mayo Clinic.

Columbia student’s seeking to get warts removed can schedule an appointment with Medical Services [3] on the Morningside campus via Open Communicator [4] or by calling (212) 854-2284. If you’re a student at the Medical Center campus, try reaching out to Student Health [5] or the Center for Student Wellness for [6] further information.

Warts may look unsightly, but that’s really the only "problem" they cause. Hope you still get to enjoy that massage!

Alice!

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Published date:
Jan 01, 1994
Last reviewed on:
Nov 09, 2012

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