

Cryotherapy

A large number of skin lesions can be removed by freezing with liquid nitrogen. It is an excellent, fast and relatively inexpensive procedure with which dermatologists are extensively experienced.

WHAT TO EXPECT: Moderate stinging/burning while freezing, thawing, and for a few seconds followed by mild itchiness or tenderness.

Swelling/redness and mild tenderness for 1-2 days.

Blistering only rarely occurs with a shallow freeze, but is more expected with deeper freezes.

Blisters may be clear or filled with some blood.

Dry crust and some redness for 1 to 3 weeks (or gradually resolving blister).

Healing is fastest on the face and slowest on the legs. Healing, of course, is also faster for lesions that are frozen only lightly.

New skin thereafter may be slightly red for days to weeks. With freezing there is always a risk that the treated area may appear lighter and rarely darker, or even scarred. All of these changes improve with time and are less likely with lighter freezes. Some persistent paleness can occur.

HOW TO CARE FOR THE TREATED SITE: Generally no care is necessary. Avoid picking at or trying to remove the crust. This will fall off on its own. Make-up can be used over the treated site. Avoid excessive scrubbing and soap since these can cause irritation. If a blister forms and is tense and painful you can puncture it with a sterile needle to reduce the discomfort. Leave the blister roof in place. If a blister is drained or breaks, or an area of raw or open skin develops apply antibiotic ointment (Polysporin) or Vaseline and a band aid daily until healed to prevent infection. If a blister is not broken no special care is needed.

PERSISTENT LESIONS: If the lesion does not resolve with freezing it will need re-treatment. This occurs more commonly when the lesion is thick or when frozen very lightly (to minimize side effects). Generally it is best to wait 3-4 weeks for complete healing to determine whether there is any remaining lesion. Re-treatment should then be within a few weeks thereafter while the lesion is smaller. Remember that if the lesion is a pre-cancer and it persists, it needs re-treatment. Also, if a lesion persists after freezing we recommend that it be rechecked to be sure it is non-cancerous. With freezing, as with all of medicine, we unfortunately cannot guarantee results even though this does have a very high success rate.

