

PATIENT INFORMATION

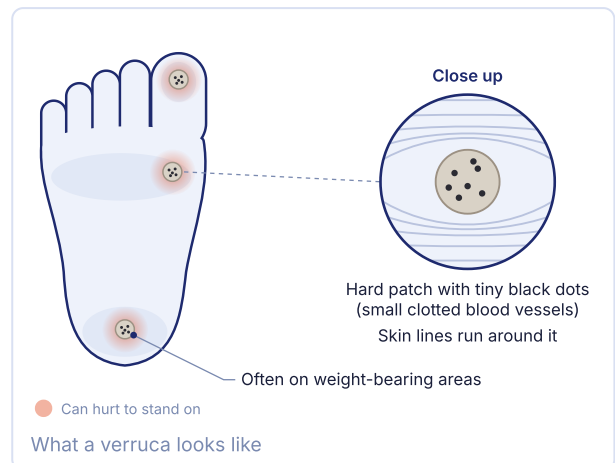
Verrucas

What they are, how they spread and how they are treated

Written by **William Joyce**, Consultant Podiatrist, HCPC registered · The Functional Podiatrist, Richmond & Kensington · Updated October 2026

IN SHORT

A verruca is a wart on the sole of the foot caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). It usually looks like a hard patch with small black dots and can be painful to stand on. Many clear on their own over months or years, but stubborn verrucas are common in adults and respond best to professional treatment such as needling.



What does a verruca look like?

A hard, flat or slightly raised patch on the sole, often with tiny black dots.

- The black dots are small clotted blood vessels
- It is painful when squeezed from side to side
- It can appear alone or in clusters (mosaic verrucas)
- Body weight presses it inwards, so it can hurt to stand on

How do you catch a verruca?

Through contact with the virus on wet, shared surfaces. Swimming pools, gym changing rooms and communal showers are the usual sources. The virus gets in through small cuts or cracks in the skin.

Is it a verruca or a corn?

A verruca has black dots and hurts when squeezed; a corn hurts with direct pressure. Skin lines tend to run around a verruca but through a corn, and corns sit over pressure points. If you are not sure, or it is changing, get it checked.

Do verrucas go away on their own?

Many do, but it can take months or years. The immune system eventually recognises the virus. In adults verrucas often persist, and treatment is worth considering if one is painful, spreading or not responding to pharmacy treatments.

What treatments are available?

Verruca needling has the strongest evidence for stubborn verrucas.

- Verruca needling under local anaesthetic: 69–70% clear after one session, and 80–90% after a second
- Cryotherapy and acid treatments: around 65% success over 3–6 sessions, well suited to children
- Swift microwave therapy, available at our Richmond clinic

How long does treatment take?

After needling, most verrucas clear within about three months. Acid and freezing treatments usually need 3 to 6 sessions over several weeks.

Can children be treated?

Yes. Cryotherapy and acid treatments are generally preferred for younger children. Needling needs a local anaesthetic and is usually used for older children and adults.

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FROM THE CLINIC

"I usually suggest professional treatment when a verruca is painful, spreading or has not responded to pharmacy treatments. For long-standing verrucas in adults, needling is often my first recommendation because it has the strongest evidence base."

William Joyce, Consultant Podiatrist, The Functional Podiatrist

Three things you can do today

- 1 Wear flip-flops or pool shoes in communal showers and changing rooms.
- 2 Cover it with a waterproof plaster or verruca sock when swimming, and use your own towel.
- 3 Leave it alone. Picking or scratching helps it spread.

When to see a podiatrist

- It is painful or affecting walking or sport
- It is spreading, or there are several
- No improvement after 12 weeks of pharmacy treatment
- You have diabetes, poor circulation or reduced feeling in your feet
- It bleeds, changes colour or shape, or you are not sure it is a verruca

Get it properly assessed

Your treatment plan depends on what is driving the problem. We assess, explain what we find and build a plan around your activity and goals.

HCPC-registered podiatrists in Richmond (Pools in the Park, TW9 2SF) and Kensington (Sprint Physiotherapy, W8 4LY). No referral needed.

More on this condition: thefunctionalpodiatrist.uk/verrukas.html

Book an assessment

Call 020 3576 0630

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