



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Cryotherapy

Information for patients having cryotherapy treatment and their relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Dermatology Department York:

York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Telephone: 01904 726629

Opening times: Monday- Friday 7am- 5pm

Dermatology Department Scarborough:

Scarborough Hospital, Woodlands Drive,

Scarborough, YO12 6QL

Telephone: 01723 342492

Opening times: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8am- 4pm

Outpatients Department Selby:

The New Selby War Memorial Hospital,

Doncaster Road, Selby, YO8 9BX

Telephone: 01904 72 4296

Opening times: Monday- Friday 8am- 5pm

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What is cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy is a method of freezing which uses a substance called liquid nitrogen. A carefully controlled amount of liquid nitrogen is applied to the affected area of skin. This has the effect of freezing the targeted cells and destroying any lesions.

What happens at my first appointment?

You will be seen by one of clinicians in the Dermatology Clinic where your first treatment will be given. The doctor will prescribe follow-up treatments if required by either a doctor or a nurse.

The doctor will determine the length of time of your treatment. The treatment itself only takes a matter of seconds.

Before you start the treatment, we will ask you to sign a consent form to confirm that you are happy to go ahead. You can have a copy of this form and a copy will be saved in your patient notes.

What does the procedure involve?

The liquid nitrogen is usually applied using a spray gun or cotton bud for about five to 30 seconds. It feels cold, but most people find the discomfort quite bearable.

Some lesions may need soaking to help with the removal of any hard skin before the treatment. A nurse will discuss this with you if this is needed.

How often will I have to come to clinic?

Some lesions can be treated with a single freeze, but others may need to be frozen many times.

The Dermatology clinician will decide the frequency of the treatment.

The nurses administering the treatment will continue the treatment until they feel the area is fully treated.

It is possible the treatment may not be successful;

If cryotherapy has not cleared the lesion after three months of treatment, it is highly unlikely to be effective.

What are the risks and side effects of this treatment?

Cryotherapy is a safe and reliable treatment, and the cosmetic result is usually very good. However –

- Cryotherapy can be painful, although the procedure is very quick, the discomfort can last up to 10 minutes, in some cases this can be longer.
- Cryotherapy is applied to destroy the abnormal cells; this will likely cause some irritation to the treated area and sometimes the surrounding area.
- Cryotherapy may not completely destroy the abnormal cells. Depending on the nature of the lesion, more than one treatment may be necessary, and this is usually repeated at regular intervals.
- Very rarely, a scar may form, especially if a deep freeze has been necessary.
- Pigmentation changes – the skin on and around the treatment site may lighten or darken in colour, and this change can rarely be permanent.
- As with any procedure there is a small risk of infection, but we will discuss what to expect after the procedure.
- Very rarely after prolonged treatments you may experience some numbness in the treated area.

What should I expect after the treatment?

- Within 24 hours, the treatment skin will become red and swollen. The degree of swelling will depend on the site and the duration of freezing.
- The redness and swelling usually lasts for a few days. Sometimes, a blister will form (blood in a blister is not sinister) just as with a burn. If this happens, keep the area clean. If necessary, do this using a dry dressing. If the blister becomes uncomfortable, use a clean (ideally sterile) needle to gently release the fluid. A dressing can be applied and changed each day after washing the healing blister.
- A scab will form after a few days. This will normally come off approximately 10 days later, leaving a pinkish coloured area underneath which will gradually fade. You should allow the scab to fall off naturally.
- You should be able to wash the area normally, but do not rub the area when drying with a towel – instead, pat the area dry.
- Do not go swimming until the area has scabbed over.

Is there anything I can do to help?

You may be prescribed a cream by the doctor to apply daily for two to three days after freezing. This can sometimes help reduce the swelling and discomfort.

If you have any problems such as severe pain, swelling that does not respond to simple painkillers, you are concerned about infection, or if any change occurs that has not been covered by the above explanations, please contact us; contact details are on the front of this leaflet.

You can also contact your GP.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Katy Maskell, Sister, Dermatology Department,
York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or
telephone 01904 726621.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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