



Education

Outpatient Cryosurgery

What is cryosurgery?

Cryosurgery is a procedure in which abnormal body tissues (sometimes referred to as lesions) are destroyed by exposure to extremely cold temperatures.

When is it used?

Cryosurgery is used to treat skin lesions such as freckles (for cosmetic reasons), hemorrhoids, warts, and some skin cancers.

It is also used to treat skin changes caused by the genital wart virus and precancerous changes on the surface of a woman's cervix. These precancerous abnormalities are usually found with a Pap test. (The lesions are also called CIN, or cervical intraepithelial neoplasia.) Sometimes freezing is not an option if the abnormal areas are too large.

Cryosurgery is not done on the cervix if you are having your menstrual period or if you are pregnant.

How do I prepare for cryosurgery?

Most likely you will not have to do anything to prepare for cryosurgery. It is a simple procedure and it is done in a short time in your health care provider's office.

What happens during the procedure?

Your health care provider will use a probe-like tool to treat the affected areas. A very cold substance, such as liquid nitrogen, is pumped through the probe. This freezing agent makes the tip of the probe very cold.

Your provider will touch the tip of the probe to your skin or cervix. Depending on the area being treated, you may feel a burning or cramping sensation while the area freezes and then thaws. Although the procedure may cause some discomfort, an anesthetic is rarely needed.

How long your health care provider keeps the probe touching the skin or cervix depends on the size and type of the lesion and the type of freezing agent used. For some abnormal tissue, such as genital warts, the procedure works best if the tissue is frozen quickly, allowed to thaw for a few minutes, and then frozen again.

What happens after the procedure?

For skin lesions such as warts, a small blister will form. The blister will later become a scab or a crust. Your health care provider will tell you how to care for the wound.

There are usually no complications from this procedure. However, sometimes women who are having cervical cryosurgery have hot flashes, become dizzy, or faint. If you have cryosurgery of the cervix, you will be asked to stay in the health care provider's office for at least 20 to 30 minutes after the procedure. Although it is rare, you may become dizzy or faint more than 30 minutes after the procedure, so it is a good idea to have someone take you home. You may have mild abdominal cramping during and after cervical cryosurgery. You may also have a watery or slightly bloody discharge from the vagina after the procedure. This discharge may last 4 weeks. You should avoid sexual intercourse for 4 weeks.

Some abnormal tissues may need to be treated more than once. Your health care provider will tell you how often you need to be checked for recurrence or to have another treatment. You will need a follow-up visit to check healing and to see if any abnormal tissue still remains.

If you have cervical cryosurgery for an abnormal Pap test, your health care provider will tell when you should have

your next Pap test.

Follow your health care provider's instructions for checking back for problems, questions, and your next visit.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

Cryosurgery is very effective and is less expensive than other treatments. It can be done in your health care provider's office and anesthesia is not necessary.

What are the risks associated with procedure?

If you are treated for a cervical lesion, during or after cryosurgery you may experience:

- fainting
- hot flashes
- cramping in your lower abdomen
- bleeding.

If you are being treated for a skin lesion, you may have:

- discoloration of the treated area
- damaged hair and sweat glands in the treated area
- minor scarring.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your provider if:

- The treated area is bleeding or not healing.
- The lesions reappear.
- The treated area develops symptoms of infection (redness, tenderness, swelling, or discharge from a treated area of skin).
- After cervical cryosurgery you have abdominal cramps for more than 24 hours.
- After cervical cryosurgery you have a foul-smelling vaginal discharge for longer than your health care provider told you to expect or the discharge becomes yellow or gray in color.
- You have vaginal bleeding that lasts longer than 1 hour.

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