

Wondering about Worrisome “Warts”?

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A 25-year-old woman seeks treatment for her multiple “plantar warts.” She has previously been treated unsuccessfully with liquid nitrogen. She is also concerned about her malodorous feet.

Her past medical history is non-contributory. Physical examination reveals multiple pits and maceration on both soles.

What is your diagnosis?

This is a case of pitted keratolysis.

Pitted keratolysis is a benign cutaneous condition most commonly caused by *Micrococcus sedentarius* bacteria. It can also be caused by other micro-organisms, such as *Dermatophilus congolensis*, *Corynebacterium* and *Actinomyces* species. These micro-organisms produce proteolytic enzymes that focally destroy the stratum corneum, thus creating crateriform pits. They also release sulfur-compound by-products that give rise to the associated malodour.

This common disorder affects both men and women, especially those whose feet are kept humid for long periods.



Predisposing factors include:

- hyperhidrosis,
- hot and humid climates,
- long-term wearing of occlusive footwear and
- immersion of the feet.

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Skin lesions are 0.5 to 7.0 mm shallow pits that involve the weight-bearing aspect of the soles. Rarely, palms can be affected as well.

Patients often complain of excessive plantar sweating, sliminess and malodour, which can at times be socially disabling. Pits are usually asymptomatic; however, some may experience itchiness and/or soreness.

How would you treat this patient?

Treatment of pitted keratolysis is manifold. First, the feet should be kept as dry as possible by:

- thoroughly drying the feet after bath or shower;
- avoiding occlusive footwear;
- using absorbent socks (cotton or wool);
- changing humid socks frequently;
- using antiperspirants;
- applying aluminum chloride solutions and
- using inert antiseptic foot powders

Second, the causative agent should be treated with:

- benzoyl peroxide
- topical antibiotics (clindamycin, erythromycin, fusidic acid)
- topical antifungals (miconazole, clotrimazole)
- Whitfield's ointment.

CME

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