Cryotherapy for Skin Lesions

This information explains what cryotherapy is and how to care for yourself after your cryotherapy procedure.

Cryotherapy is a procedure that uses extreme cold (liquid nitrogen) to destroy tissue. It’s often used to treat skin lesions, which are skin growths or patches that don’t look like the skin around them. The lesions can be:

- Benign (not cancerous)
- Precancerous, such as actinic keratosis. These are scaly patches on your skin that could become cancer in the future.
- Superficial skin cancer (skin cancer that’s on the surface of your skin).

Cryotherapy also aims to save the area around the lesions and to reduce the scarring as much as possible.

You don’t have to do anything to prepare for cryotherapy but you may need to remove makeup, lotion, or powder before your procedure.

Your doctor will then spray liquid nitrogen on the area being treated to freeze it.
After Cryotherapy

- The treated area will become red soon after your procedure. It also may blister and swell. If this happens, don’t break open the blister.

- You may also see clear drainage on the treated area. This is normal.

- The treated area will heal in about 7 to 10 days. It will probably not leave a scar.

Caring for yourself after cryotherapy

- Starting the day after your procedure, wash the treated area gently with fragrance-free soap and water daily.

- Leave the treated area uncovered. If you have any drainage, you can cover the area with a bandage (Band-Aid®).

- If the treated area develops a crust, you can apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) on until the crust falls off.

- If you have any bleeding, press firmly on the area with a clean gauze pad for 15 minutes. If the bleeding doesn’t stop, repeat this step. If the bleeding still hasn’t stopped after repeating this step, call your doctor’s office.

- Don’t use scented soap, makeup, or lotion on the treated area until it has healed. This will usually be at least 10 days after your procedure.

- You may lose some hair on the treated area. This depends
on how deep the freezing went. The hair loss may be permanent.

- Once the treated area has healed, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 to the area to protect it from scarring.
- You may have discoloration (pinkness, redness, or lighter or darker skin) at the treated area for up to 1 year after your procedure. Some people may have it for even longer or it may be permanent.

**Call Your Doctor or Nurse if You Have:**

- A temperature of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Chills
- Any of the following symptoms at or around the treated area:
  - Redness or swelling that extends to areas of untreated skin
  - Increasing pain or discomfort in the treated area
  - Skin in the treated area that’s hot or hard to the touch
  - Increasing oozing, or drainage (yellow or green) from the treated area
  - A bad smell
  - Bleeding that doesn’t stop after applying pressure
- Any questions or concerns
Any problems you didn’t expect

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Cryotherapy for Skin Lesions - Generated on July 24, 2019
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