Cryotherapy (liquid nitrogen)

The lesion on your skin has been treated with liquid nitrogen which is a very cold substance. Its purpose is to destroy the abnormal cells and allow normal cells to regenerate. The treatment area will usually scab and crust and may look black before it starts to heal.

Side effects of this treatment

Immediate side effects:

- Pain – cryotherapy is generally well tolerated but sometimes it can cause discomfort if a deep freeze has been necessary. The discomfort should subside shortly after the treatment. If the area remains uncomfortable, paracetamol will help relieve this.
- Swelling and redness – this is a normal reaction and will settle after a few days.
- Blistering – 24–48 hours after treatment, it is normal for a blister to form, especially on the shin. If a blister does form, release the fluid with a sterile needle. Repeat this until the blister no longer refills.
- Infection – this rarely occurs and can cause increased pain and pus.

Long-term side effects:

- Scarring – this rarely occurs unless deep freezing has been necessary.
- Pigmentation changes – the skin around the treatment site may lighten or darken in colour.

Caring for the treated area

Your doctor will explain how they would like you to care for the area. If the area becomes weepy or is in an area that may rub on clothes, we suggest using a small plaster to cover the area. If it is weepy, then apply antiseptic cream twice a day for a week. In some circumstances you may be given a prescription for topical agent to use - if so, apply twice a day.

Healing

Healing of these areas normally takes around one to three weeks but may take longer if larger areas have been treated.

Further treatments

Depending on the nature of the lesion, more than one treatment may be necessary, and this is usually repeated at regular intervals.

Revised: July 2026 Planned review: July 2029
© The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust SM-1730-03

Radiotherapy and Chemotherapy Services F538021 & F538022

Contact details

Dermatology Nurses

Tel: 0208 915 6091

(Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm)

Email: Dermatology.nurses@rmh.ns.uk

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Hotline: 020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

© The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust SM-1730-02