

Gynaecology Department - Vulval Clinics

Imiquimod

Imiquimod is an immune response modifier. It is manufactured as a 5% cream called Aldara™. Imiquimod is mainly used to treat genital warts, and certain types of skin cancer. It can also be a useful treatment for some women with VIN (Vulval Intra-epithelial Neoplasia).

Imiquimod works by stimulating the immune system to release a number of substances which are important in fighting viruses and destroying pre-cancer cells and cancer cells. When used to treat pre-cancerous conditions like VIN it causes inflammation, which destroys the VIN. The amount of inflammation is quite variable from person to person. Imiquimod is particularly useful on areas like the vulva where surgery or other treatments may be difficult, complicated or otherwise undesirable.

Treatment regime

Before starting treatment, biopsies may be performed to confirm the diagnosis. The cream is usually applied up to three times a week for 16 weeks. You may need to apply the cream more or less frequently than originally planned or for a shorter or longer course, depending on response. Once the inflammation has settled there is generally a good or excellent cosmetic result with very little scarring.

How to use Imiquimod

- Wash your hands before and after applying Imiquimod cream.
- Cut the top off the sachet and squeeze the cream out onto your fingertip.
- Apply the cream to the affected areas.
- As far as possible try not to get the cream on normal skin.



Patient Information

Some patients find it helpful to apply a thin layer of Vaseline to the surrounding normal skin to stop the Imiquimod getting onto normal skin, but this is not essential.

The cream should be applied at night-time and rubbed in until it vanishes. It should be left on for 6-10 hours and washed off with mild, non-perfumed soap and water in the morning.

Although the information on the packet states that the sachet is for single use, you can store it in a clean closed container to prevent the cream drying out and reuse the sachet.

Imiquimod cream can weaken condoms, so the two should not be used at the same time.

Imiquimod is not recommended in pregnancy.

What to expect

Areas treated with Imiquimod will become inflamed. The effects include itching, burning, redness, ulceration (sores), scabbing, flaking and pain. These reactions indicate that the cream is likely to be effective. If there is no inflammation, Imiquimod is unlikely to clear the VIN. An exaggerated response may clear the VIN sooner than expected.

If you develop a severe reaction with black scabs and severe ulceration, stop applying the cream and arrange to see your doctor as soon as possible. If there is a severe reaction, sometimes a break in treatment is recommended for a few weeks, before restarting the cream once or twice a week. A steroid ointment, such as Betnovate can be prescribed to control severe inflammatory reactions. A cream called Flamazine is sometimes used in between treatments to reduce the risk of infection.

Other side effects

'Flu-like' symptoms may develop, such as fever, fatigue, headache, nausea, diarrhoea and muscle pain. These are generally mild and may be treated with paracetamol. However, if they are troublesome, stop applying Imiquimod cream and contact your doctor. Side effects should resolve

Patient Information

within a few days of stopping treatment. They may also resolve with continuing treatment.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Colposcopy clinic 024 7696 7222 (8.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday)

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 7222 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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