

Gynaecology - Vulval Clinics

Imiquimod

Imiquimod is an immune response modifier. It's manufactured as a 5% cream called Aldara™.

Imiquimod is used to treat genital warts and certain types of skin cancer. It can also be a useful treatment for vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN).

Imiquimod works by stimulating the immune system to release substances important in fighting viruses and destroying pre-cancer and cancer cells.

When used to treat pre-cancerous conditions like VIN, Imiquimod causes inflammation. This destroys the VIN. The amount of inflammation varies from person to person.

Imiquimod is particularly useful on areas like the vulva where surgery or other treatments may be difficult, complicated, or 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.

Depending on the response, you may need to apply the cream more or less often or for a shorter or longer course than originally planned.

Once the inflammation has settled, there is generally a good or excellent cosmetic result with little scarring.



Patient Information

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.
- Try not to get the cream on normal skin.

Some patients find applying a thin layer of Vaseline to the surrounding normal skin helpful. This stops the Imiquimod from getting onto normal skin. This isn't essential.

Apply the cream at nighttime and rub it in until it vanishes. Leave the cream on for 6-10 hours. Wash it off in the morning with mild, non-perfumed soap and water.

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 from drying out and reuse the sachet.

Imiquimod cream can weaken condoms. Do not use Imiquimod and condoms at the same time.

Imiquimod is not recommended during 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 suggest 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.

Stop applying the cream if you develop a severe reaction with black scabs and severe ulceration. Arrange to see your doctor as soon as possible.

If there is a severe reaction, a break in treatment is sometimes recommended for a few weeks before restarting the cream once or twice a week.

Patient Information

A steroid ointment, such as Betnovate, can be prescribed to control severe inflammatory reactions.

A cream called Flamazine is sometimes used between treatments to reduce the risk of infection.

Other side effects

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

Side effects should resolve 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 or 024 7696 6598
8am to 5pm Monday - Wednesday and Fridays

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