

# Imiquimod

## What is Imiquimod?

Imiquimod cream is a topical immune response modifier and is often used for the treatment of Vulvar Intraepithelial Neoplasia (VIN) and genital warts. It works by increasing the body's immune response. It is used as treatment of carefully selected patients who are able to comply with a treatment course (typically 16 weeks). It is available in two strengths: 5% (Aldara) and 3.75% (Vyloma or Zyclara).

## How do I apply Imiquimod cream?

Imiquimod is applied topically to individual lesions only, not to the entire vulva. Apply a thin layer to the affected area. Allow the cream to go just over the edge of the affected skin. Wash your hands thoroughly before and after application of the cream. Ideally the cream stays on your skin for about 8 hours. You can apply it at night and wash it off in the morning.

## What is a typical treatment course?

Your doctor will discuss your specific treatment schedule with you but below is a sample of a typical treatment course. The first three weeks are called the induction phase and help your skin get used to the medication.

- Week 1: apply once per week
- Week 2: apply twice per week
- Week 3: apply three times per week
- Weeks 4 to 16: apply three to five times per week, as tolerated

## What can I expect?

Within 3 to 5 days the skin treated will become red and sore. The area may be itchy, sore or painful. This is a sign that the treatment is working. The skin reaction tends to be worst in the first 2 to 3 weeks of application. It is normal for the redness to persist for around 2 weeks after the treatment course is finished.

## What are the side effects?

Mild pain, itch, and burning are the most common side effects. The skin may become darker or lighter following the treatment. In rare cases this change in colour is permanent. There is a small risk of scarring and hair loss in the treated area. There is a risk of infection as the medication damages the barrier function of the skin. Very rarely, a patient can be allergic to the cream. Some patients report a headache or flu-like symptoms.

## How can I manage the side effects?

If you are struggling with pain or burning, or skin breakdown skip your doses until the symptoms or skin improve. Try restarting with a reduced frequency and slowly building back up. Ibuprofen and Acetaminophen can be used for discomfort. A cool ice pack may be soothing. If you are not sure if your treatment reaction is normal, if you are worried about a side effect or you have an infection you should see your doctor.

## What cautions apply for use of imiquimod cream?

Imiquimod should not be used if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, and not in areas exposed to sunlight or a sunbed.

**What is the follow up plan?** You will be assessed half way through your treatment course (8 weeks) and then again a couple months after you complete treatment to assess the response.