

Patient information

Imiquimod (Aldara™) for the treatment of Vulval Intraepithelial Neoplasia (VIN)

Please read this leaflet before you begin using Imiquimod and keep it for reference. It contains useful information to help you with your treatment.

Why have I been given this treatment?

You have been given Imiquimod cream to treat your vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN).

VIN means that there are abnormal cells in the skin of your vulva. These abnormal cells **ARE NOT** cancer, but in a small number of women they may develop into cancer over many years. We have no way of knowing whether your abnormal cells will develop into cancer or not. Treatment may reduce the risk of developing cancer at a later date.

What is the aim of this treatment?

The main aim of treating VIN is to relieve symptoms such as pain, itching or burning. Treatment may also reduce the risk of developing cancer at a later date.

What is imiquimod cream?

We now know that VIN is caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and imiquimod is emerging as a possible treatment.

Imiquimod is an immune response modifier, which means that it stimulates your own immune system to fight the HPV.

Imiquimod is currently licensed for use on genital warts which are caused by a different type of HPV.

It has also recently been licensed for the treatment of actinic ketatosis (a common skin lesion that also has the potential to become skin cancer).

Research has also shown that Imiquimod may be effective in other skin conditions such as VIN.

Imiquimod causes inflammation (redness and swelling) of the skin. This inflammation may help your body get rid of the abnormal cells.

The degree of inflammation will vary from person to person.

What can I expect?

Imiquimod is not an easy treatment to use because it causes inflammation.

Because it stimulates your immune system which results in inflammation you **WILL** get some or all of the following to some degree:

- Redness
- Wearing away of the skin
- Flakiness
- Swelling
- Blisters
- Tenderness

The degree of inflammation you get does not mean that the cream is more or less effective.

All symptoms decline in severity with less frequent use. Some women also get 'flu' like symptoms such as headache, fatigue and occasionally diarrhoea. These symptoms clear when treatment is stopped.

How do I use Imiquimod?

Start by using the cream once a week, then increase the frequency until you are using it three times a week. If it is very uncomfortable after the first use, wait until the symptoms ease before using it again. Be guided by how severely you react. If you can manage three times a week do so, but if not, use it as often as you can manage.

Imiquimod cream should be left on for 6 - 10 hours, so put it on before bed and wash it off in the morning using Hydromol or Dermol 500.

Squeeze Imiquimod onto your finger tip. Use a mirror to identify the area to be treated. Rub in the cream gently until it has vanished.

Use just enough to cover the area, this may not be the whole sachet.

Wash your hands thoroughly after using Imiquimod.

- **DO NOT** have sex on the night you use the cream, even with a condom, as Imiquimod weakens the latex of the condom.
- **DO NOT** take by mouth or allow to come into contact with eyes.
- **DO NOT** share your cream with anybody else.

Tips for success

As Imiquimod works with your immune system it can take time to work. ***Try and persevere.***

The following tips may help you:

- Put a barrier such as Vaseline on the vulva to protect skin.
- Paracetamol based pain killers will help with mild symptoms however **do not** take anti-inflammatory medication such as aspirin or ibuprofen (Brufen), unless you are taking these for other reasons.
- Avoid using Imiquimod if you have an important event coming up, for example, before holidays.
- Use Hydromol liberally in between Imiquimod treatments. Keep a tub in the fridge and apply cold to soothe irritation.
- Maintain the usual care for vulval skin, for example, don't use soap or wash underwear in biological powder.
- If you need to visit your GP, inform them of your treatment.
- **Stop using Imiquimod if your reaction is severe and you are unable to tolerate it.**

If you have any further queries and would like to speak to a nurse please telephone 01284 713601, an answer phone is available.

Reference

This patient information leaflet has been adapted for use in our hospital from an original patient information leaflet produced by the South East Wales Gynaecological Oncology Centre in 2016.

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<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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