

Imiquimod (Aldara, Zyclara)

Imiquimod is a compound that stimulates the immune system. It can be used to remove superficial skin cancers and precancers, warts, and some other abnormal skin growths. The length and frequency of application varies with the condition being treated and with individual patients.

How do I use it?

THERE IS NO SINGLE APPLICATION ROUTINE that applies to all, or even most, patients. In this practice we strongly prefer demonstrating application face-to-face; this is a review of what should already have been discussed.

- A *tiny* amount of this is applied to the lesion(s) or area: for most people it is recommended that this be dispensed from a pinhole in the packet. Then the packet can be folded over and used for the next application.
- For skin cancers, begin application 2 times daily, then, when irritation develops, reduce frequency. Some people only need to use it once or twice a week!
- For precancers this is continued for 1 month; for actual skin cancers, for 6 weeks.
- You should wash your hands after applying it.
- You do not need to cover the area with anything, but you can if you wish. It will prevent spreading to other areas of skin.
- Keep it away from the eyes.
- If you have not used this before, we require that you have an office visit 2–3 weeks after starting it.
- Once you finish the medication, the area of skin treated will be red and raw. It generally takes about 3–4 weeks for all of the inflammation to resolve. You may use Vaseline or Eucerin cream to soothe the skin. Alternatively, we can give you a prescription cream to help things heal a little faster if you would like.

Common side effects:

The only common effect is discomfort and inflammation at the site where it is applied. Sometimes adjacent areas become inflamed, and there is usually some swelling around the application site.

Rare side effects:

Other more serious side effects can happen, more likely if a large amount is used, or if the area treated is large:

- Headache
- Flu-like symptoms
- Dizziness
- Cold sore/herpes reactivation
- Very rarely there have been reports of diarrhea, chest pain, urinary retention or a generalized rash

You should contact our office if you have any of the serious side effects, if you are unsure if the local reaction is OK, or if you are just worried about it.

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