

Imiquimod Treatment

Imiquimod is the active ingredient found in a number of brand-name and generic topical medications. It's sometimes referred to as 'topical chemotherapy' since it can help destroy the atypical cells found within skin lesions such as warts, 'pre-cancers', and even certain types of superficial skin cancer.

Please remember the following when using *imiquimod*:

First, ***the treatment sites may get red and inflamed***. The amount of inflammation which occurs is usually proportionate to the degree of 'atypia' within the treatment site. Keep in mind that sun-exposed skin is essentially 'peppered' with *slightly* abnormal cells as a result of past exposure to UV light. Therefore, treatment on the face, scalp, ears, neck, chest, forearms, or hands is likely to cause *some* degree of inflammation wherever the medication is applied. By their very nature, skin cancers are **dense** collections of abnormal skin cells, so when they're being treated, inflammation can be quite intense. Warts, on the other hand, may not get very inflamed at all. In order to limit the degree of inflammation, do not apply excessive amounts. Only a thin layer of cream needs to be applied to each affected area.

Second, ***do not put a bandage over the treatment site while the medication is on your skin***. Doing so makes the medication work too strongly and causes far too much inflammation. For example, if you have a social event to attend where the area must be covered with a bandage, it's OK to do so *as long as you don't have the medicine on at the same time*. Also, it's OK to occasionally skip a treatment if the irritation becomes too intense or even if you simply forget. As long as you treat the site on most of the days for the duration that it was prescribed, then it should work just fine.

Third, ***when and how you put it on imiquimod is important***. You should avoid too much direct sunlight exposure of the treatment site. For this reason, you may want to consider using *imiquimod* in the evening. Doing so will allow you to apply sunblock, a light coat of make-up, or even a bandage during the day if needed. When applying at night, though, we do request that you apply it *at least 30 minutes before sleeping* so that it has a chance to soak in before you lay down.

One last feature of *imiquimod* which can be particularly frustrating is that it can be **very expensive**, yet is prescribed in **very small quantities**. So if find that you're able to treat the entire affected area using less than the full quantity of each packet or tube, ask your doctor if it's OK to seal it shut and use any residual medication for the next application.