

[Home](#)

2. Aldara

Aldara

Generic name: [imiquimod topical](#) [*i-MI-kwi-mod-TOP-ik-al*]**Brand names:** Aldara, [Zyclara](#)**Drug classes:** [Topical anti-infectives](#), [Topical antineoplastics](#)Medically reviewed by [Sophia Entringer, PharmD](#). Last updated on Jan 21, 2025.[Uses](#) [Warnings](#) [Before taking](#) [Dosage](#) [Side effects](#) [Interactions](#) [FAQ](#)

What is Aldara?

Aldara is an immune response modifier. Aldara is used to treat actinic keratosis (a condition caused by too much sun exposure) on the face and scalp.

Aldara (for the skin) is also used to treat a minor form of skin cancer called superficial basal cell carcinoma, when surgery would not be an appropriate treatment.

Aldara also treats genital warts that appear on the outside of the body, but this medicine is not a cure for genital warts. Imiquimod may be used in adults and children who are at least 12 years.

Aldara may also be used for purposes not listed in this medication guide.

Warnings

Using too much Aldara, or using it for too long can increase your risk of severe skin reactions. Follow your doctor's instructions.

Do not use Aldara on areas of broken, wounded, or burned skin (including sunburn).

Before using Aldara, tell your doctor if you have a weak immune system, an autoimmune disorder, graft-versus-host disease, or if you have recently received a bone marrow transplant or cord blood transplant.

When treating genital warts around the vagina, avoid getting the cream on the more sensitive inner layers of vaginal tissue. This could result in vaginal swelling or irritation and painful urination. Avoid exposure to sunlight or tanning beds. Aldara can make you sunburn more easily. Wear protective clothing and use sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) when you are outdoors.

Aldara is not a cure for genital warts and it may not keep you from spreading this condition to others through vaginal, anal, or oral sex. You may develop new lesions during treatment with Aldara. For best results, keep using the medicine for the entire length of time prescribed by your doctor.

Imiquimod will not protect against sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, HIV, syphilis, and trichomoniasis.

If you are treating the genital or rectal area with Aldara, avoid sexual activity while the medicine is on your skin. Aldara can weaken the rubber that condoms or diaphragms are made out of. If you use a condom or diaphragm for birth control, these items could break if the rubber weakens and an unplanned pregnancy could result.

Before using Aldara

To make sure you can safely take Aldara, tell your doctor if you have any of these other conditions:

- sunburn or other skin problems;
- a weak immune system or autoimmune disorder;
- graft-versus-host disease;
- if you have recently been treated for actinic keratosis or genital warts with surgery or other medications; or
- if you have recently received a bone marrow transplant or cord blood transplant.

FDA pregnancy category C. It is not known whether Aldara will harm an unborn baby. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant while using this medication. If you are treating the genital or rectal area with Aldara, avoid sexual activity while the medicine is on your skin. Aldara can weaken the rubber that condoms or diaphragms are made out of. If you use a condom or diaphragm, these items could break if the rubber weakens, and an unplanned pregnancy could result. It is not known whether imiquimod passes into breast milk or if it could harm a nursing baby. Do not use this medication without telling your doctor if you are breast-feeding a baby. Do not use this medicine on a child younger than 12 years old. Aldara is for use in treating genital warts in patients who are at least 12 years old. All other uses of this medication are for adults over 18 only.

 [Aldara pregnancy and breastfeeding warnings](#) (more detail)

How should I apply Aldara?

Use Aldara exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Do not use in larger or smaller amounts or for longer than recommended. Follow the directions on your prescription label.

Using too much of this medicine, or using it for too long can increase your risk of severe skin reactions.

Before applying Aldara, wash your hands and wash the skin area to be treated. Allow the skin to dry for at least 10 minutes before applying the medicine. Always wash your hands after applying the medicine also. Do not use Aldara on areas of broken, wounded, or burned skin. Wait until these conditions have healed before using Aldara.

Aldara is normally used 2 to 5 times per week for up to 16 weeks. How you use this medication will depend on the condition you are treating. Follow your doctor's instructions.

Actinic keratosis:

Aldara is usually applied 2 times per week (such as Monday and Thursday, or Tuesday and Friday) for a full 16 weeks. Apply the cream to the treatment area in a thin layer, and rub in the cream until it disappears. Use the medicine before going to bed and leave it on for 8 hours. In the morning, wash off the medicine with water and a mild soap.

Superficial basal cell carcinoma:

Usually applied 5 times per week (such as Monday through Friday) for a full 6 weeks. Apply the cream from one Aldara packet to the treatment area and the border of skin around it, and rub in the cream until it disappears. Use the medicine before going to bed and leave it on for 8 hours. In the morning, wash off the medicine with water and a mild soap.

Genital warts:

The 5% cream is usually applied 3 times per week (such as Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) for no longer than 16 weeks. Apply the cream from one Aldara packet to the treatment area, and rub in the cream until it disappears. Do not cover the treated skin areas with any type of plastic bandaging, and avoid nylon underwear. You may wear cotton gauze or underwear over the treated area. Use the medicine before going to bed and leave it on for 6 to 10 hours. Then wash off the medicine with water and a mild soap.

When treating genital warts under the foreskin of an uncircumcised penis, pull back the foreskin and wash it with mild soap and water before applying Aldara. Clean this area daily during treatment. When treating genital warts around the vagina, avoid getting the cream on the more sensitive inner layers of vaginal tissue. This could result in vaginal swelling or irritation and painful urination.

Aldara is not a cure for genital warts and it may not keep you from spreading this condition to others through vaginal, anal, or oral sex. You may develop new lesions during treatment with Aldara. For best results, keep using the medicine for the entire length of time prescribed by your doctor.

All conditions:

Your doctor will need to check your skin on a regular basis, especially if you have a more severe skin reaction to the medication. Do not miss any scheduled appointments.

Call your doctor if your skin condition does not improve or if it gets worse during treatment.

Do not use Aldara to treat any skin condition that has not been checked by a doctor. Do not share this medication with anyone else, even if they have the same symptoms you have.

Each packet of Aldara is for a single application only. Throw away the packet after one use, even if there is medicine left in it. If you treat more than one skin area at a time, ask your doctor how many packets to use.

Store Aldara at room temperature away from moisture and heat. Do not freeze. Keep each packet unopened until you are ready to use it.

 [Detailed Aldara dosage information](#)

What happens if I miss a dose?

Skip the missed dose and wait until the next time you are getting ready for bed to use the medicine. Do not use extra medicine to make up the missed dose.

What happens if I overdose?

Seek emergency medical attention or call the Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222.

Overdose symptoms may include severe skin irritation, feeling light-headed, or fainting.

What should I avoid?

Avoid getting Aldara in your eyes, mouth, and nose, or on your lips. Do not place the cream in your rectum, vagina, or urethra. If it does get into any of these areas, rinse with water. Do not use Aldara on sunburned, windburned, dry, chapped, irritated, or broken skin.

Avoid using other medications on the areas you treat with Aldara unless your doctor tells you to.

Avoid exposure to sunlight or tanning beds. Aldara can make you sunburn more easily. Wear protective clothing and use sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) when you are outdoors.

Avoid having unprotected sex. Imiquimod is not a cure for genital warts, and it will not protect against sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, HIV, syphilis, and trichomoniasis. Talk with your doctor about safe ways to prevent transmission during sex.

Aldara side effects

Get emergency medical help if you have any of these signs of an allergic reaction to Aldara: hives; difficulty breathing; swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat. Wash off the medicine and call your doctor at once if you have a serious skin reaction such as severe itching, burning, oozing, bleeding, or skin changes where the medicine is applied.

Stop using Aldara and call your doctor at once if you have a serious side effect such as flu symptoms such as fever, chills, body aches, tired feeling, swollen glands. When treating genital warts around the vagina, if you have severe swelling or urination problems, stop using Aldara and call your doctor right away.

Less serious Aldara side effects may include:

- mild skin irritation, itching, dryness, flaking, scabbing, crusting, redness, or hardening of the skin where the medicine was applied;
- changes in the color of treated skin;
- headache, dizziness, chest pain, back pain;
- cold sores, fever blisters;
- cold symptoms such as stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat;
- nausea, diarrhea, loss of appetite; or
- vaginal itching or discharge.

This is not a complete list of side effects and others may occur. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

 [Aldara side effects](#) (more detail)

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What other drugs will affect Aldara?

It is not likely that other drugs you take orally or inject will have an effect on topically applied Aldara. But many drugs can interact with each other. Tell your doctor about all medications you use. This includes prescription, over-the-counter, vitamin, and herbal products. Do not start a new medication without telling your doctor.

 [Aldara drug interactions](#) (more detail)

Does Aldara interact with my other drugs?

Enter medications to view a detailed interaction report using our [Drug Interaction Checker](#).

Aldara

+

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Further information

Remember, keep this and all other medicines out of the reach of children, never share your medicines with others, and use Aldara only for the indication prescribed.

Always consult your healthcare provider to ensure the information displayed on this page applies to your personal circumstances.

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DRUG STATUS

Availability

Rx Prescription only

Pregnancy & Lactation

 Risk data available

CSA Schedule*

N/A Not a controlled drug

Approval History

10+
years FDA approved 1997



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6.9 / 10

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