Another treatment option for genital warts [1]

Alice,

I have had warts for about fifteen years and I usually have them frozen, but I have heard there is a cream out now. Have you heard this and do you know anything about it?

? chilled out

Answer

Dear chilled out,

You heard correctly. Imiquimod (brand name Aldara) is a prescription medicated cream that can be used to treat external genital warts caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). Imiquimod is an immune response modifier, which means that not only does it clear the warts; it also stimulates the body's immunity against HPV.

Traditional treatments for genital warts have focused on the physical removal of the warts themselves through cryosurgery (freezing), lasers, or use of certain chemicals. These procedures take place in hospitals or health care providers' offices. Imiquimod cream, prescribed by a health care provider, can be used at home by an individual. The medication needs to be applied to the warts three times a week at bedtime and then washed off each morning, for up to four months. It's important to know that imiquimod cannot be used internally (e.g., inside the vagina or anus), and that sexual activity is not recommended when the cream is on ? so people need to apply it after having sex.

Half of the people using the cream in studies reported that their warts completely disappeared within four months, and most people stayed wart-free for as long as three months after treatment. Some who used the cream reported skin irritation (such as redness, inflammation, itching, burning, and scaling), but these were mostly mild to moderate cases.

Another at-home treatment available by prescription is podofilox gel (brand name Condylox). Podofilox is applied in the morning and at night for three days, followed by a four day rest period. Then, if the warts are still present, the cycle can be repeated. People using podofilox should refrain from having sex for the duration of the treatment, and, like imiquimod, the gel cannot be used internally.

Remember that imiquimod and podofilox are treatments, not cures. Although warts may develop while being treated, these medications provide more options for people with genital
warts to help manage the infection. Even if warts are not visible, people with genital warts, and people who do not want to get genital warts, would be wise to use safer sex strategies or techniques to prevent transmission. Using condoms, for example, can help decrease the chances of getting a skin-to-skin contracted sexually transmitted infection (STI), such as genital warts or herpes.

If you are thinking about trying imiquimod or podofilox, you can see your health care provider to discuss which treatment method will work best for you.

Way to keep an ear out for new developments in HPV treatment,

Alice!

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