



CREAMS FOR SKIN CANCER

Recently there have been reports regarding creams that can treat skin cancer. Here is an explanation.

Aldara (Imiquimod)

Aldara is the only cream that has an effect on skin cancer. It has been used previously as a treatment for genital warts. It works by alerting the immune cells in the body to the presence of the cancer, then the body breaks it down. It only treats one type of cancer – the Basal Cell Cancer. Its results are pleasing, but not perfect. Cure rates are about 80% for this type of cancer. This compares with surgery at about 98%. I believe it has a place in treating cancers where scarring would be a problem with surgery, or where there are many skin cancers, which would require many excisions. Due to its lower success rate, I believe it should not be used where spreading of the cancer could cause further problems, such as on the nose and ears, or where a cancer has a chance of being one of the more serious types. It must be used daily for six weeks, which can be a reason some people may prefer surgery. Its price can also be a drawback - \$150 is the cost of a full size packet.

Efudix (Fluorouracil)

Efudix is a cream which can replace the use of the freezing gun in treating solar keratoses, which are sun damage that later can develop into skin cancers. It does not treat skin cancers. It works like chemotherapy, in destroying the top layers of the skin. This is a similar ideology to the freezing gun. There are some drawbacks. It must be used twice daily for four to eight weeks, where the freezing gun can be used quickly on one occasion. The effect is greater than the freezing gun, with most people experiencing some discomfort and scab formation on the skin. It does not successfully treat the larger keratoses, which still require freezing. It costs about \$40 for a tube, which is enough for most people to treat the problem area. The effects last much longer than the cryotherapy gun, with most people having no further problems with the treated area for up to two years. While treatment is continuing, there must be no sun exposure, or the reaction is more severe.

Salicylic Acid Cream

Salicylic Acid is a cheap, easy, painless method of softening solar keratoses, especially those on bald men's heads. It is applied once daily. It does not cure the solar keratoses, but keeps them at bay until your next visit, relieving the associated irritation and roughness. It is available at the standard prescription price.