

Patient Information Leaflet

Managing your Mild Dry Skin Conditions with Over the Counter (OTC) Emollients

This leaflet contains information about mild dry skin conditions and how you can treat them yourself using over the counter (OTC) emollients. Emollient is the medical word for moisturiser.

What causes mild dry skin?

Mild dry skin is a common condition. The skin is made up of many different layers and it forms a natural barrier to protect our body from the outside environment. To help protect the outer layer of skin from losing water, the skin produces an oily substance called sebum. If the skin doesn't have enough sebum, it loses water and feels dry.

Preventing and treating mild dry skin

There are lifestyle changes that can be made to help treat and prevent dry skin:

- ✓ Drink plenty of water
- ✓ Increase air humidity which can be achieved by placing a damp towel on a warm radiator as dry air has low humidity and increases the risk of dry skin
- ✓ Reduce the time spent in your bath or shower
- ✓ Avoid perfumed soaps, bubble baths and washing detergents
- ✓ Avoid scratching; or scrubbing the skin too hard
- ✓ Use products that are applied to the skin that contain a few, or gentler ingredients
- ✓ Wear non-irritant clothing made from natural fibres including cotton or linen instead of synthetic garments
- ✓ Avoid extremes of temperature (e.g. cold winds, blazing sun) or having the central heating turned up too high
- ✓ Moisturise your skin frequently throughout the day, including before and after certain activities such as bathing, gardening, and swimming
- ✓ If you smoke or drink excess alcohol, consider stopping.

What are emollients?

[Emollients](#) are moisturising treatments applied directly to the skin to soothe and hydrate it. They cover the skin with a protective film to trap in moisture. They are often used to help to manage dry, itchy or scaly skin conditions including [dermatitis](#), [eczema](#), [psoriasis](#), and [ichthyosis](#). They help to prevent patches of inflammation and flare-ups of these conditions. Patients with mild dry skin conditions successfully manage these using OTC emollient products on a long-term basis.



There are different types of emollients including lotions, creams, ointments and sprays, which are available to buy from pharmacies and other retailers.

Further information is available from this weblink: [Guidance on emollients and how to use them](#).

How will treating my mild dry skin with an OTC emollient affect me?

NHS England guidance advises that OTC products should not be routinely prescribed for certain conditions that can be managed by self-care or are a minor ailment. Based on this guidance, GPs will not be able to prescribe treatment for mild dry skin conditions. More information about this NHS guidance is available on the [Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board \(HWE ICB\) website](#).

If you are experiencing a mild dry skin condition you should ask for treatment advice from a local pharmacist and/or buy an OTC product to treat your symptoms from a pharmacy or supermarket.

It is important to always read the medicine label, check how to apply the emollient and whether it is suitable for children.

Which emollient is appropriate for mild dry skin conditions?

The most appropriate type of emollient depends on the dryness of the skin, the area of skin affected, and what is comfortable and acceptable to you. You may have to try a few different emollients to find the best one for you or your child's skin. Your local pharmacist can advise you on the most appropriate treatment for your symptoms and can suggest other ways to help manage your condition. They can advise when you need to see a doctor for your symptoms if they persist.

There are some exceptions when an OTC product could be prescribed. **You should see your GP if you experience any of the following:**

- eczema, dermatitis or psoriasis which has flared up and your usual emollients or treatment are not helping
- ichthyosis (very dry, scaly skin that may also be thick and rough)
- when emollients are needed to complement another treatment, such as phototherapy
- where there is a risk to skin health, for example cracked or bleeding, very sore, shows signs of infection (red, hot, swollen, crusty, oozing, spreading).

Safety Information

Fire Risk: Keep away from fire, flames, cigarettes, and when you use any types of emollient. Follow the product guidance on dressings, clothing, and bedding that have been in contact with an emollient. Washing fabrics at high temperatures may reduce the build-up of an emollient but does not remove it completely.

Risk of slipping: Be careful not to slip when using emollients in a bath or shower, or on a tiled floor. Place a rubber suction mat in the bath or shower. Protect the floor with a non-slip mat, towel, or sheet. Wear protective gloves to wash your bath or shower afterwards with hot water and washing-up liquid, then dry with a kitchen towel.

Skin reactions: Emollients can sometimes cause a skin reaction, including:

- an overheating, burning sensation, or stinging that does not settle down after a few days' treatment; this is possibly caused by a reaction to an ingredient in the emollient
- blocked or inflamed hair follicles (folliculitis) that may cause boils
- rashes on the face that can aggravate acne

If you experience any of these symptoms, then speak to a healthcare professional.

Helpful resources:

Websites	• Emollients - NHS  • Emollients and eczema creams • Clothing and eczema - National Eczema Society
HWE ICB Website	• Emollients and how to use them • Over the counter medicines for minor health conditions – Information for patients
You can also visit your local pharmacy or contact NHS 111 for advice	