

Emollients continued

Some creams contain preservatives, fragrances and other additives. Some people become sensitised (allergic) to an ingredient. This can make skin inflammation worse. If you suspect that you are sensitive to an emollient, contact your pharmacist for advice and try an alternative.

Note: Ointments tend to cause fewer problems with skin sensitivity as they usually do not contain preservatives. They usually need to be applied less often than creams or lotions for the same effect.

Thick emollient ointments sometimes block the hair follicles in the skin causing mild inflammation/infection of the affected hair follicles (folliculitis). Apply thick ointments in the direction of hair growth to reduce the risk of folliculitis.

Soap substitutes

Most emollients can be used as a soap substitute to replace traditional soaps. They help to lock in moisture while still providing the same level of cleanliness.

Apply the emollient prior to washing and directly afterwards onto damp skin.

WARNING: emollients are flammable, keep them away from lights and flames.

Showering & bathing

Traditional bath and shower gels can cause the skin to become dry. Consider using a soap substitute and a leave-on emollient should be applied afterwards.

When should I see a GP?

- If dry skin is accompanied by redness and/or inflamed
- If the dryness and itching interferes with sleep
- If you have open sores or infection from scratching
- If you have large areas of scaling or peeling skin

More information is available at:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/emollients/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/look-after-your-skin/>
- <https://patient.info/news-and-features/why-dry-skin-winter>

WARNING: there is a risk of fire associated with the build-up of residue from emollients on clothing and bedding.

If you are using emollients, do not smoke or go near naked flames.

The NHS belongs to everybody and we must ensure that its resources are used in the best possible way for all patients.

Self Care Information:

DRY SKIN

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS



This leaflet provides tips on how to manage your dry skin effectively

Prescribing of medicines over the counter has changed. Your GP, nurse or pharmacist will not generally give you a prescription for the management of your mild dry skin symptoms, even if you qualify for free prescriptions.

What is dry skin?

Dry skin is a very common condition which can occur at any age. It usually doesn't present a serious problem and can be managed by using an emollient (moisturiser) regularly.

What causes dry skin?

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.

Common causes of dry skin:

- Excessive bathing or
- Showering, scrubbing of the skin while washing, or harsh soaps that dissolve the protective layer of sebum.
- Environmental conditions that increase water loss, such as very hot, dry weather or central heating. Frequent exposure to wind and sun can evaporate water from the skin, making the surface feel itchy and dry.
- Decreased production of sebum. This is often a factor in the elderly.

What can you do to help prevent and treat dry skin?

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

- Stop smoking.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Manage dry environments – increasing humidity can help, which can be achieved by placing a bowl of water in the room or using a commercially available humidifier.

Bathing & Washing

- Avoid bubble baths and harsh, drying soaps as they irritate and dry the skin.
- Bathe in lukewarm water and apply moisturiser within 3 minutes after bathing ('soak and seal' method).
- When drying, do not rub with a towel, but pat to avoid skin damage.

These lifestyle changes may help to reduce the dryness of the skin but further moisturising may still be required, in which case moisturisers (creams, lotions & ointments) can be used.

What treatments can I buy?

There are various products which can help prevent and treat dry skin. If you are not sure about which would be best suited to you, speak to your local pharmacist.

Types of products available to buy include:

Emollients

Emollients are used to soothe, hydrate and moisture the skin. It reduces dryness, helps with itching, reduces scaling, and softens cracks. They are applied directly to the skin and can be used frequently to help reduce water loss from the skin.

There are various types of emollients available. If you are not sure which product(s) would be best for you, speak to your local pharmacist.

How to apply:

- Wash hands and apply thinly - just so the skin glistens - gently and quickly in smooth downward strokes in the direction of hair growth.
- Apply as often as needed to keep the skin supple and moist (usually 3 to 4 times a day).
- Apply after washing to trap moisture in the skin (see overleaf for 'soak and seal' method).
- Avoid massaging in or applying too thickly as this can block hair follicles, trap heat, and cause itching.
- Emollients can be applied before or after any treatments e.g. steroid creams. It is important to leave at least 30 minutes before applying the next treatment.

Don't stop using your emollient if your skin looks better as skin can flare up again quickly.

WARNING: emollients are flammable, keep them away from lights and flames.