



Dry Skin

Patient information leaflet



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Common Ailments Service

Only use this leaflet if your pharmacist has advised you about your or your child's condition.

Dry skin can feel rough or tight, and may itch, flake or crack.

Causes of dry skin include:

- central heating or heaters
- cold, windy weather
- having baths or showers too often
- using soaps on your skin



Dry skin can be caused by conditions such as **atopic eczema** and **contact dermatitis**.

If you have atopic eczema and dry skin, it may be made worse by:

- house dust mites
- pet fur
- pollen
- biological washing powders
- detergents
- allergies to certain foods

If you have contact dermatitis, your skin may become dry when it comes into contact with something that irritates it, such as nickel in jewellery.

Dry skin often goes away quite quickly, but can last longer in people with atopic eczema or contact dermatitis. When dry skin cracks, there is a risk of it becoming infected with bacteria.



Treatment and Prevention

Medicines that can help

These medicines are not suitable for everyone. Make sure you have asked your pharmacist for advice about what treatment is best for you or your child.

An **emollient** helps:

- to moisturise your skin
- to make your skin less itchy and prevent inflammation
- your skin to work better as a barrier to bacteria and things that irritate it

Emollients come as **creams**, **lotions** and **ointments**. Your pharmacist will help you to choose a suitable emollient.

Ointments are often best for moisturising dry skin. Creams and lotions are cooling, and often better for skin that is inflamed (swollen and red on light skin, or darker brown, purple or grey on darker skin).



Treatment and Prevention

As ointments are greasier than creams, some people prefer to use them at night, and to use creams and lotions during the day. Some ointment emollients are suitable to use instead of soap. Ask your pharmacist if you are unsure whether your emollient can be used this way.

Emollients can catch fire easily. Avoid smoking or going near unprotected flames when you are using them. Your clothing and bedding can become fire hazards if emollient from your skin soaks into them. Washing your clothing and bedding at a high temperature may not completely remove the emollient.

Using an emollient

1. Use your emollient as often as you need to - every 2 to 3 hours if your skin is very dry.
2. Use plenty of emollient each time you apply it.
3. For emollients in pots without pump dispensers, use a clean spoon to remove the emollient so that bacteria from your fingers does not get into the emollient.
4. If your pharmacist has advised you to use your emollient while you are washing, take care not to fall because emollients can make baths and showers slippery. Protect the floor with a non-slip mat, towel or sheet. Afterwards, wearing protective gloves, wash your bath or shower with hot water and washing-up liquid to remove the emollient, then dry it with a kitchen towel.
5. Use your emollient just after washing. Pat your skin dry first, then smooth the emollient into your skin while it is moist.
6. Smooth the emollient in the direction of the hairs on your skin to avoid blocking the hair follicles.
7. Do not share your emollient with other people.

If your skin stings after using an emollient and does not settle after rinsing, ask a pharmacist to recommend a different product. You may have to try a few different emollients to find the best one for your skin.

Steroid cream or ointment

If your skin is inflamed, your pharmacist may advise **hydrocortisone 1%** or **clobetasone 0.05%** steroid cream or ointment. Put the cream or ointment on about 15 to 30 minutes after using your emollient. Keep using the steroid cream or ointment for 48 hours after the inflammation is better.

Always read the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine.

If you are concerned about any side effects from a treatment, report it to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist. You can also report side effects on the Yellow Card [app](#) or [website](#).

Prevention

To stop dry skin getting worse or coming back:

- use plenty of emollient each time, and keep using it after the skin has improved
- avoid using soap or bubble bath
- do not have baths too often and use warm instead of hot water
- avoid wearing woollen or rough clothes
- avoid spending a lot of time in air-conditioned places, or being close to a fire or fan heater
- shower after swimming to wash away the chlorine
- drink plenty of water
- keep your nails short and try not to scratch your skin – gently smoothing the skin with moisturiser may help with the itch
- put socks or mittens on babies to stop them scratching



When to Get Help

Contact your GP if you have:

- used an emollient, with or without a steroid cream, but the dry skin is not getting any better after 14 days, or keeps coming back
- a high temperature
- crusts on the skin, or pus or fluid leaking out
- very sore and swollen skin
- dry skin on the face or neck, armpits, groin (where the tops of the legs meet the body) or genital areas
- dry skin that is making you feel sad

If you are worried that your or your child's condition is not getting better, or is getting worse, talk to your GP.



More information

For more information on dry skin or a medicine talk to your pharmacist or look at the following websites:

NHS 111 Wales: [https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/e/article/eczema\(atopic\)](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/e/article/eczema(atopic))

Patient UK: <https://patient.info/skin-conditions/atopic-eczema/moisturisers-for-eczema-emollients>

Medicines A-Z: <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/>

British Association of Dermatologists:

Emollients <https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/emollient-use-in-skin-conditions/>

Eczema <https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/eczema-atopic/>

Information from the above resources is included in this leaflet.



Mae'r daflen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This leaflet is also available in Welsh.

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