

Bath & Shower Emollients

Changes to prescribing of bath and shower emollient products on the NHS

NHS guidance states that bath and shower emollient (moisturising) products should not be routinely prescribed for dry and itchy skin conditions, such as eczema symptoms, because there is no good quality evidence to show that they are more effective than leave-on emollients that are also used as a soap substitute.

A study showed that using 'pour in the bath' emollients did not make any difference to eczema symptoms and therefore using these products is not a good use of NHS resources. There are also risks with using bath emollients such as skin irritation, if large amounts are used, particularly if antiseptic bath oils are used.

Which bath and shower preparations are affected?

Moisturising bath and shower preparations include bath oils that are poured into the bath water and bath and shower emollient products that are used to wash the body.

What options are available instead of these bath and shower preparations?

It is still really important to use leave-on emollient moisturisers and avoid soap. Leave-on emollients can be used as a soap substitute too. Mix a small amount (around teaspoonful) of emollient in the palm of your hand with a little warm water and spread it over damp or dry skin. Rinse and pat the skin dry, being careful not to rub it off. You can use soap substitutes for handwashing, showering or in the bath. Emollients do not foam like normal soap but are just as effective at cleaning the skin

Where can I find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, GP or the person who prescribed the medication to you.
- NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/emollients/>
- British Medical Journal. Results of the BATHE study including patient video. <https://www.bmj.com/content/361/bmj.k1332>
- National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). Atopic eczema in under 12s: diagnosis and management. Clinical guideline [CG57] <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg57/chapter/recommendations#emollients>