

Emollients

What is an emollient?

Emollients have a key role in helping to manage dry, itchy or scaly skin conditions and are particularly useful in treating psoriasis. They are often the first treatment a GP or pharmacist will suggest.

Emollients are applied to the surface of the skin to help soothe, soften, and increase moisture levels as well as reducing scaling or dryness, and making the skin feel more comfortable. It is also thought that regular use of an emollient can help other topical (applied to the skin) treatments to work more effectively.

The terms 'emollient' and 'moisturiser' are often used interchangeably. In Dermatology, the term 'emollient' is used to refer to non-cosmetic moisturisers – they are usually fragrance-free and specifically formulated to treat dry skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema, rather than for general use.

1

Types of emollient

Emollients can come in many different forms including ointment, cream, lotion, gel, and spray.

Ointments – These are greasy and very effective at holding in water in the skin and helping to repair the skin barrier. They can be good for use at night and have fewer preservatives as they contain little water.

Creams – These contain a mixture of oil and water. They are not as greasy as ointments so are better for daytime use. They are also useful for weeping skin.

Lotions – Lotions contain more water and less oil than creams. They contain more preservatives and spread easily. They can provide cooling properties and are often useful for quick absorption and in more hairy areas.

Gels – Gels have a high oil content but are light and non-greasy.

Sprays – Sprays are oil in a spray form. They are often very useful for treating harder to reach places.

Bath / Shower products - Some emollients are added to the bath or used instead of soap, whilst others are applied directly to the skin and left to sink in. They should often be used directly after washing or bathing in order to increase effectiveness and hydrate the skin.

How to use emollients

Emollients should be used liberally (a generous amount) and frequently as part of a regular skincare routine, even when the skin is clear or has improved. Smooth the emollient gently into the skin along the line of hair growth, rather than rubbing them in.

Some emollients can be used in more than one way – always check the information leaflet that comes with the product and several different emollients may be required at the same time (for example for different areas of skin or for different stages of a flare). You may find that a combination of moisturisers works best for you, and that different moisturisers are more appropriate at different times of day. There is no correct order to apply emollients and they should be applied in the order they work best for you. If using products with active properties, (such as steroids or vitamin D based treatments) you should wait at least 30 mins before applying anything else. You should also wait at least 30 minutes **after** applying your emollient before applying anything else.

2

It is important that you are prescribed the appropriate amount of emollient. The frequency with which emollients are used will vary depending on how severe the psoriasis is at the time, but at least 2-4 times a day is usually required. For very dry skin, every 2-3 hours may be needed.

The following table may be useful as a general guide to the amount your GP / Healthcare professional should prescribe:

Body Site	Creams or ointments		Lotions	
	One week supply	One month supply	One week supply	One month supply
Face	15-30g	60-120g	100ml	400ml
Both hands	25-50g	100-200g	200ml	800ml
Scalp	50-100g	200-400g	200ml	800ml
Both arms and legs	100-200g	400-800g	200ml	800ml

Trunk (neck, chest, tummy and back)	400g	1600g	500ml	2000ml
Groins & genitalia	15-25g	60-100g	100ml	400ml

Points of note

Some emollients contain paraffin as an ingredient. Paraffin is flammable, and there is a danger that smoking or using a naked flame could cause dressings or clothing that have been in contact with the emollient to catch fire. If you use a paraffin-based emollient, you should avoid naked flames (for further information please see [MHRA guidance](#)), not smoke, and change clothing and bedding regularly.

Emollients can make bath or shower trays very slippery. Take care not to slip when using them in the bath or shower or on a tiled floor. You could protect the floor with a non-slip mat, towel or sheet and wash your bath or shower thoroughly afterwards.

Available products

It is not possible to say if one emollient works better than another as what works for one person may not necessarily work as well for someone else. There are many cosmetic and non-cosmetic moisturisers and emollients on the market to choose from. The best one is the one you feel happiest with and that you can use easily on a regular basis.

The following products are all currently listed in the British National Formulary as being suitable for use in treating psoriasis or other dry skin conditions. They should all be available on prescription or can be purchased in a pharmacy.

While recent NHS England guidance has listed emollients as items that should no longer be prescribed for mild, dry and pruritic skin conditions, psoriasis is a long-term chronic condition and is included as an exception to this guidance meaning anyone diagnosed with **any type** of psoriasis is still entitled to receive emollients on prescription. Bath and shower products may not be available on prescription. Further advice on this issue is available on the Psoriasis Association [website](#).

While this list is as comprehensive as possible, it is not exhaustive and, in some cases, there are many different-named versions of the same product available. Availability can also differ across the country. These details are correct at the time of printing but are subject to change. Do read the

information leaflet that comes with the emollient and ask a doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions, or for more information.

Please see below for a list of emollients:

Bath Products

These are thin and oily in texture and are usually added to the bath water. Some bath emollients can be applied to wet skin directly and rinsed off.

Product Name	Active Ingredients	Method of Application
Balneum Bath Oil	Soya oil	Add 20-60ml to bath (5-15ml for infants). Not to be used undiluted.
Balneum Plus Bath Oil	Soya oil, lauromacrogols	Add 20ml to bath (5ml for infants) or apply to wet skin and rinse
Cetraben Emollient Bath Additive	Light liquid paraffin	Add 1-2 capfuls to bath ($\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 capful for children) or apply to wet skin and rinse
Dermalo Bath Emollient	Wool alcohols, liquid paraffin	Add 15-20ml (children 5-10ml) to bath or apply to wet skin and rinse
Dermol 600 Bath Emollient	Benzalkonium chloride, liquid paraffin, isopropyl myristate	Add up to 30ml to bath (up to 15ml for infants)
Doublebase Emollient Bath Additive	Liquid paraffin	Add 15-20ml to bath (5-10ml for infants). Soak for 10-20 minutes.
E45 Emollient Bath Oil	Cetyl dimethicone, liquid paraffin	Add 15ml to bath (5-10ml for infants / children) or apply to wet skin and rinse
Emulsiderm	Liquid paraffin, isopropyl myristate, benzalkonium chloride	Add 7-30ml to bath or rub into dry skin until absorbed
Hydromol Bath and Shower Emollient	Isopropyl myristate, light liquid paraffin	Add 1-3 capfuls to bath ($\frac{1}{2}$ - 2 for infants) or apply to wet skin and rinse
LPL 63.4	Light liquid paraffin 63.4%	Add 1-3 capfuls/bath ($\frac{1}{2}$ - 2 for children or infants) or apply to wet skin and rinse

Oilatum Junior Bath Additive	Light liquid paraffin	Add 1-3 capfuls to bath (½ - 2 for infants) or apply to wet skin and rinse
Oilatum Plus Bath Additive	Benzalkonium chloride, triclosan, light liquid paraffin	Add 1-2 capfuls to bath (infant over 6 months 1ml). Not to be used undiluted.
QV Bath Oil	Light liquid paraffin	10ml in bath (infant 5ml) or apply to wet skin and rinse
Zerolatum Emollient Bath Additive	Liquid paraffin, acetylated wool alcohols	Add 15-20ml to bath (5-10ml for children)
Zeroneum Bath Additive	Refined soya bean oil	Add 20ml to bath (5ml for children)

Shower Products

These are used in the shower to wash the body with, in place of shower gel or soap.

Product Name	Active Ingredients	Method of Application
Aquamax Wash	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin, cetostearyl alcohol	Apply to wet or dry skin and rinse.
Dermol 200 Shower Emollient	Benzalkonium chloride, chlorhexidine hydrochloride, isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Apply to skin or use instead of soap
Dermol Wash Emulsion	Benzalkonium chloride, chlorhexidine hydrochloride, liquid paraffin, isopropyl myristate	Apply to skin or use instead of soap
Doublebase Emollient Shower Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	To be applied to wet or dry skin and rinse or apply to dry skin after showering.
Doublebase Emollient Wash Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Use as a soap substitute
E45 Emollient Wash Cream	Soap substitute, zinc oxide	Use as a soap substitute
Hydromol Bath and Shower Emollient	Isopropyl myristate, light liquid paraffin	Add 1-3 capfuls to bath (½ - 2 for infants) and soak for 10-15 minutes or apply to wet skin and rinse

5

Oilatum Shower Gel	Light liquid paraffin	Apply to wet skin, massage in, then rinse and dry
QV Wash	Glycerin (glycerol)	Use as a soap substitute

Lotions

These are thin or runny in consistency, and easily absorbed. A lotion alone will usually not be effective in treating very dry skin such as psoriasis but may be useful as part of a larger moisturising regime.

Product Name	Active Ingredients	Method of Application
Dermol 500 Lotion	Benzalkonium chloride, chlorhexidine hydrochloride, liquid paraffin, isopropyl myristate	Apply to skin or use instead of soap
E45 Moisturising Lotion	Light liquid paraffin, cetomacrogol, white soft paraffin, lanolin, isopropyl palmitate	Apply directly to skin.
QV Lotion	White soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin as often as required

6

Creams

These are thicker than lotions, but still easily absorbed.

Product Name	Active Ingredients	Method of Application
Aquadrate Cream	Urea	Apply a thin layer directly to skin twice daily
Aquamax Cream	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Balneum Cream	Urea, ceramide	Apply directly to skin, twice daily
Balneum Plus Cream	Urea, lauromacrogols	Apply directly to the skin, twice daily
Calmurid Cream	Urea, lactic acid	Apply a thick layer directly to the skin, twice daily
Cetraben Cream	White soft paraffin, light liquid paraffin,	Apply directly to the skin

E45 Cream	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin, hypoallergenic lanolin	Apply directly to the skin (up to three times a day)
E45 Itch Relief Cream	Urea, macrogol lauryl ether	Apply directly to the skin twice daily
Enopen Cream	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin,	Apply directly to skin as often as required
Epaderm Cream	Emulsifying wax, yellow soft paraffin, liquid paraffin, chlorocresol, glycerin	Apply directly to skin, or use as a soap substitute
Epimax Cream	White soft paraffin, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin as often as required
Hydromol Cream	Sodium pidolate, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Hydromol Intensive Cream	Urea 10%	Apply thinly twice a day
ImuDERM Emollient	Urea 5% and glycerin	Apply directly to skin or use as a soap substitute
Lipobase Cream	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Nutraplus Cream	Urea, hydroxybenzoates, propylene glycol	Apply directly to skin, 2-3 times daily
Oilatum Cream	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Oilatum Junior Cream	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
QV Cream	Glycerol, light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin as often as required and particularly after bathing
Soffen Cream	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Unguentum M Cream	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin, Sorbic acid, Cetostearyl alcohol, Propylene glycol	Apply directly to skin three times a day
ZeroAQS Emollient Cream	Macrogol cetostearyl ether, liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin, or use instead of soap
Zerobase Cream	Liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Zerocream	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin

Zeroguent Cream	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin, refined soya bean oil	Apply directly to skin
-----------------	---	------------------------

Ointments

These are thick and greasy, and usually take some time to be absorbed. However, they are very effective at holding moisture in the skin.

Product Name	Main Ingredients	Method of Application
Fifty:50 Ointment	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Aquaderm Hydrous Ointment	Magnesium sulfate, phenoxyethanol, wool alcohols	Apply directly to skin
Aquaderm Liquid Paraffin	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Bell's Emollient 50 Ointment	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Cetraben Ointment	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin, cetostearyl alcohol	Apply directly to skin or use as a soap substitute
Emelpin Ointment	Emulsifying wax, yellow soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
EmulsifEss Ointment	Emulsifying wax, white soft paraffin, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Epaderm Ointment	Emulsifying wax, yellow soft paraffin, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin, add to bath, or use instead of soap
Epaderm Junior Ointment	Emulsifying wax, yellow soft paraffin	Apply directly to the skin and use as often as required
Hydromol Ointment	Emulsifying wax, Yellow soft paraffin,	Apply directly to the skin, or use as a bath additive or soap substitute
KreaMoint 50:50 Ointment	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to dry skin as often as required
Liquid and White Soft Paraffin Ointment	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin

Pure Health Liquid Paraffin	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
QV Intensive Ointment	Light liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Thirty:30 Ointment	Emulsifying wax, yellow soft paraffin	Apply directly to skin
White soft paraffin	White petroleum jelly	Apply directly to skin
Yellow soft paraffin	Yellow petroleum jelly	Apply directly to skin
Zeroderm Ointment	Liquid Paraffin, White Soft Paraffin	Apply directly to the skin as often as required. Can also be used as a soap substitute.

Gels

These usually feel light and non-greasy, despite having effective moisturising properties.

Product Name	Main Ingredients	Method of Application
Adex Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin, glycerol	Apply directly to the skin three times daily or as required
Aproderm Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Doublebase Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin as required
Doublebase Dayleve Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin
HypoBase Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Myribase Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin
Zerodouble Gel	Isopropyl myristate, liquid paraffin	Apply directly to skin

9

Sprays

These can be useful to moisturise parts of the body that are difficult to reach.

Product Name	Main Ingredients	Method of Application
--------------	------------------	-----------------------

Dermamist Emollient Spray	White soft paraffin, liquid paraffin, coconut oil	Spray onto skin after bathing (from about 20cm distance)
Emollin Aerosol Spray	Liquid paraffin, white soft paraffin	Spray directly onto skin

More in-depth information on the benefits of using emollients and the properties of certain ingredients can be found on the **Moisturising** information sheet, available from the Psoriasis Association.

The information in this resource is not intended to replace that of a healthcare professional. If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment, do discuss this with your healthcare professional and **always read the patient information leaflet** to make sure you are using it correctly.

For more information, or for a list of resources used in producing this information sheet, please contact the Psoriasis Association.

March 2023 (Review Date: 03/26)

