

DRY SKIN



Dry skin feels rough and doesn't shine like healthy skin. It can become hard and may crack. In eczema (dermatitis) dry skin often becomes red and itchy.

Causes of dry skin include: hot, dry or cool, windy conditions; bathing too much; using soaps, detergents and alcohol-based products on your skin or wearing rough clothes. If you have atopic eczema then house dust mites, flakes of skin from animals, or pollen may also make your skin dry, or you may get dry skin when you feel stressed or eat certain foods.

How can I treat dry skin?

Use a moisturiser (emollient) to protect your skin. Emollients block out things that may irritate your skin, and help to keep moisture in your skin. They can also help with itching. Your pharmacist will help you to choose a suitable emollient. You may want to try a few different emollients at first.

Often, ointments work better on dry skin than creams or lotions, but creams and lotions are better for skin that is red and swollen. You can use ointment emollients instead of soap in the bath or shower but take care as they can make the bath or shower slippery. Some people use creams and lotions on their skin during the day and only use ointments at night time, because ointments are greasier. If you have atopic eczema, you will probably have times when your skin does not seem dry, but you should carry on using your emollient because this will help to stop your skin getting worse again.

Hydrocortisone cream or ointment may help if your skin is swollen, red or itchy, but it is not suitable for everyone. Your pharmacist will tell you if hydrocortisone is a suitable treatment for you. Carry on using your emollient when you're using hydrocortisone, and continue to use the hydrocortisone for 48 hours after the redness has gone.

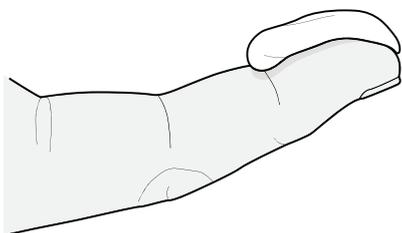
Once you have found an emollient that suits you then you can buy further supplies of it from your pharmacy or ask your doctor.

How should I put the emollient on my skin?

- Emollients work best when they are spread on to damp (not wet) skin, so put your emollient on after bathing or showering whenever you can.
- Use your emollient 2 or 3 times a day, or more often if you like. Use plenty of emollient each time.
- If you have a large pot of emollient without a pump, use a spoon to take out some of the emollient each time you use it. You can put the emollient onto a saucer before picking it up with your fingers. This will help to stop bacteria getting into the emollient from your fingers.
- With some emollient on your fingers, stroke your skin gently in the same direction as the hairs are growing. Don't rub your skin.
- If you're also using hydrocortisone, put the emollient on your skin first. After about 30 minutes, when your skin is not slippery anymore, put on the hydrocortisone.

Emollients that contain paraffin can be a fire hazard so you should not smoke, use naked flames or be near people who are smoking or using naked flames, or go near anything that may cause a fire while emollients are in contact with your medical dressings or clothing. Change your clothing and bedding regularly - preferably daily - because emollients soak into fabrics and can also become a fire hazard. Ask your pharmacist for a leaflet about these risks or download a leaflet [here](#)

How should I put the hydrocortisone on my skin?



- Spread the hydrocortisone cream or ointment thinly across your skin.
- One fingertip unit is the amount of hydrocortisone cream you would squeeze out of the tube if you squeezed out a line the length of an adult's fingertip.
- 1 fingertip unit is enough to cover both sides of an adult's hand (including fingers).
- 8 fingertip units are enough to cover an adult's leg and foot.

What else can help?

- Avoid hot and dry, or cool and windy conditions.
- Avoid spending a lot of time in air-conditioned places, or being close to a fire or fan heater.
- Don't bath too often or for too long. When you do bath or shower, it may help to use an ointment emollient instead of soap or bubble bath, and to use warm water rather than hot water. Be careful because the emollient may make the bath or shower surfaces slippery.
- Don't let detergents and products containing alcohol or fragrances touch your skin. Use vinyl or other non-powdered, non-rubber gloves to protect your hands.
- Avoid wearing rough clothes such as woollen clothes.
- Don't use aqueous cream – this may irritate your skin.
- Don't scratch if your skin is itchy. Scratching can make the itching worse and your skin may get infected. Rub an itchy area with your fingers instead. Using an emollient and hydrocortisone can also help with itching.
- If you go swimming, shower in fresh water afterwards to wash away the chlorine from your skin. Put emollient on your skin after drying it with a towel.

Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if:

- you think your skin is infected. Signs of infection are having a high temperature, feeling ill, and red and swollen skin, sometimes leaking fluid or with crusts or pus.
- You've treated your skin with an emollient, with or without hydrocortisone, but it's not getting any better.

Where can I find further information?

Patient UK: www.patient.info

British Association of Dermatologists: www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.