

infection: use an emollient with a pump dispenser, or use a clean spoon to take out the amount you need each time.

- Apply emollients straight after a bath or shower, as they may be more effective.
- Apply emollients in the direction of hair growth to avoid blocking hair follicles.
- Try storing emollient creams (not ointments) in the fridge, as cool soothes itch. Store in the airing cupboard if your child prefers emollients warm.
- Apply a thick layer of a greasy emollient before swimming to protect from the irritant effects of pool water. Shower and apply your usual emollient after.
- Carry a small container of emollient whenever you are out and about.
- If frequent skin infections are a problem, use an emollient with antibacterial additives e.g. Dermol 500.
- Emollients containing urea are extra moisturising and useful for extremely dry skin e.g. Hydromol Intensive, Balneum cream, Flexitol Heel Balm.
- Emollients occasionally sting when applied to inflamed skin: this usually settles after a few days, but you should change emollient if it persists.
- Treat all skin, not just the affected area.
- Continue using emollients even when your child's skin starts to improve: the aim is to stop skin from drying, rather than to treat already dry skin.

Please discuss with your child's GP or paediatrician if you have any further questions about the use of emollients, or if you are unsure how to manage your child's eczema. The National Eczema Society is an excellent resource for further information and advice: www.eczema.org

References

Get control and Keep control. Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust. 2013.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a question, compliment, comment or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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Eczema: Emollients

A parent's guide



Emollients are medical moisturisers which lubricate the skin. When used correctly, they are important active treatments for dry, itchy skin conditions such as eczema. They help repair the damaged natural barrier of the skin, protect skin from irritation and infection, and reduce redness and itch.

Many different emollients are available in many different formulations, such as creams, ointments, bath additives and soap substitutes. Most can be purchased over the counter. This leaflet outlines some of the emollients we regularly prescribe. There is no 'right' emollient and everyone will have different preferences.

Types of Emollients

Soap Substitutes

Soap dries the skin and can make it itchy. Use soap substitutes for all washing. These cleanse the skin effectively but do not lather like soap. Many creams and ointments can also be used as soap substitutes.

Examples: Cetraben, Diprobath Cream, Wash E45, Emulsifying Ointment, Hydromol Ointment, EpiDerm. With antibacterial: Dermol 500.

For the shower: Dermol Shower, Oilatum Shower, E45 Shower.

Creams

These are not particularly greasy. They are absorbed quickly and tend not to stain clothes and are, therefore, good for daytime use. They are easy to spread over sore and weeping skin and need to be applied every 3-4 hours to be effective.

Examples: Diprobath Cream, Cetraben, Hydromol Cream, Doublebase, Ultrabase, Oilatum Cream, Aveeno Cream, E45 Cream. With antibacterial: Dermol 500. With urea: Calmurid, Hydromol Extra.

Ointments

These are greasy and are useful for very dry or itchy skin because they hydrate better than creams. They do take longer to absorb and so may make clothes greasy: some prefer to use these at night. They need to be applied every 6-8 hours. Do not use these on weeping eczema.

Examples: 50% white soft paraffin in liquid paraffin (50/50 mix), EpiDerm, Hydromol, Emulsifying Ointment, Emollin 50:50 (a spray formulation which some find easier to apply).

WARNING: skin products containing white soft paraffin and emulsifying ointment are easily ignited with a naked flame or cigarette.

Bath Additives

Bath bubbles, like soap, can irritate and dry skin. Instead, emollient bath additives should be added to the water to help moisturise skin and leave a fine, protective film on the skin after bathing. Take care as they may make the bathtub slippery.

Examples: Oilatum, Bath E45, Hydromol, Diprobath, Aveeno bath oil. With antibacterial: Oilatum plus, Dermol 600.

Emollient Tips

- Use emollients regularly, at least 3-4 times a day: you cannot use too much – they have no dangerous side-effects
- Children may need 250g emollient every week (500g for adults)
- For children who are also prescribed steroid creams, whilst there are no rules about whether to apply the emollient or the steroid first, you should allow at least 20-30 minutes for the first to absorb before applying the second
- Do not put your fingers into tubs of emollients as this risks spreading