

Bath oils & shower gels for dry skin conditions

There are lots of bath oils and shower gels (also known as moisturisers or emollients) available for people to use to treat large areas of dry skin. We know that using moisturisers properly is a very important part of treating dry skin conditions such as eczema, dermatitis and psoriasis.

Do bath oils and shower gels work?

The amount of moisturiser left on the skin during bathing or showering is usually much less than if oils, moisturisers or ointments are put straight onto the skin.

By relying only on bath or shower oils, there is a real risk that people will under-treat the dry skin that is part of their skin condition.

Are there any risks in using bath oils and shower gels?

As well as being less effective at moisturising the skin, oils and shower gels coat the bath or shower and make it greasy and slippery, and so greatly increase the risk of falls. Using a bath mat or grab rails to reduce the risk of slipping is strongly advised, as well as cleaning the bath or shower properly after use. Other people who also use the bath or shower should be warned that it is likely to be very slippery.

What should you do to moisturise your skin when having a bath or shower if you don't use bath oils/shower gels?

Use moisturisers applied directly to the skin as soap substitutes to clean your skin. Don't use soap as this strips the natural oils out of your skin.

After a bath or shower it is best to dry off by patting the skin lightly with a towel rather than by rubbing. Rubbing can start the itch / scratch part of the eczema or dermatitis if that is causing the dry skin. Once the skin is almost dry but still moist, immediately apply an oil or moisturiser to seal the moisture into the skin.

Why might your GP refuse to prescribe a bath oil or shower gel?

GPs in Hertfordshire will normally not provide prescriptions for these products, because of concerns about the risk of falls and the evidence that these are less effective moisturisers than those applied directly to the skin. People who choose to continue to use them can buy them from their local community pharmacy (chemist) or supermarket where they are readily available.

For more information on moisturisers for dry skin visit www.nhs.uk

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Produced by pharmacists from Hertfordshire Integrated Commissioning Support Unit – the organisation providing specialist support to clinical commissioning groups in Hertfordshire