

Moisturisers for dry skin conditions



What is it and how can I treat it?

Moisturisers (your doctor or pharmacist may refer to them as emollients) are lotions, creams, ointments and bath/shower additives which 'oil' the skin to keep it supple and moist. They can help prevent the skin from becoming dry and itchy and flaring up into patches of eczema. They are different to steroid creams and ointments which reduce inflammation and clear flare-ups of eczema.

Moisturisers can be purchased fairly cheaply from your pharmacy, supermarket or store. And they are often cheaper to buy than to have on prescription so avoid asking your GP for them.

There are several types and brands of moisturisers - creams, lotions and ointments. As a general rule the greasier and thicker the moisturiser is, the better and longer it works, but the messier it is to use! Moisturisers that are added to the bath should generally be avoided since they are likely to make your bath greasy and slippery, increasing the chance of falling. There is no evidence that they are more effective than moisturisers applied to damp skin after getting out of the bath.

The most effective one for you will depend on the dryness of your skin, the area of skin involved, and your preference. Do try to buy small quantities of different types to find one that suits you.

Some general advice on finding the right one for you is:

- Use a lotion or cream for mild skin dryness and occasional flare ups of eczema
- Use a thicker cream or an ointment for moderate-to-severe dryness
- A lotion is often best for areas of hairy skin
- Use a cream or lotion for areas of weeping eczema

Most people with eczema will be prescribed a steroid cream or ointment to use when eczema flares up. These are very different to moisturisers, and should be used and applied in a different way. If you use the two treatments - apply the moisturiser, wait 10-15 minutes and then apply the steroid cream or ointment.

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

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