

## Handy Tips

- Do not have bath-water or shower-water too hot
- Soak in the bath for 10-15 minutes each time
- Pat the skin dry, do not rub it
- Use a mat in the bath/ shower as emollients make surfaces slippery
- Apply emollients in the direction of hair growth
- Smear emollients on, do not rub them in
- After bathing apply emollients while the skin is still damp
- Always keep a small pot of emollient with you when you go out
- Always continue with an emollient when the skin has improved as this can reduce flare ups
- If the skin gets hot and itchy keep a small pot in the fridge
- If the emollient comes in a tub use a spoon to scoop it out, do not put hands in the tub

Remember: the only emollient that works is the one that actually gets used.

People's preferences for emollients are very varied. If you are given an emollient sample pack, try each one until you find one that you like.

## Emollient Flammability

Emollients are easily transferred from skin onto clothing, bedding and bandages. Tests and research have shown that the **dried-on** emollient makes the fabric more flammable and if there is a fire it burns quickly and intensely, potentially resulting in serious injury or death. The emollient products are not flammable in their container or freshly applied to the skin, only the dried-on residue is.

It's important for anyone using these products to avoid any naked flame.

- Avoid smoking
- Change and wash clothes and bedding frequently
- Keep emollient off furniture
- Tell relatives and carers you use an emollient

**This risk is applicable to all emollients, even those that are 'paraffin-free'.**

For more information, please ask for a copy of the leaflet "Skin Creams: Alert" from the National Fire Chiefs Council.

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# Emollients

## What are Emollients?

Emollients are moisturisers that have been used for many years to treat dry skin conditions and form an essential part of treatment. They vary in their consistency from very light to greasy.

They work by moisturising the skin. This helps to smooth and soothe skin and reduce itching. They can help protect the skin by forming a barrier over it which prevents further damage. A good routine with emollients can help prepare the skin for other treatments so they work better.

There are many different emollients available which can be confusing. Generally emollients are used in two ways and if possible both ways should be included in your routine:

1. Leave-on emollients
2. Soap substitutes



## Leave-on Emollients

These are applied directly to the skin throughout the day and after bathing to prevent the skin from drying out.

It is recommended that adults use 500 g of emollient per week and children use 250 g per week.

**Ointments** are oil-based and are greasy. They are good to use on very dry skin or last thing at night. They are not suitable for infected skin that is wet and weepy and less suitable for hairy areas. Ointments contain fewer ingredients and cause less stinging and allergic reactions than other types of emollient. Examples are: Zeroderm ointment, Epimax ointment, Cetraben ointment.

**Creams** are a mixture of oil and water and are less greasy than an ointment. They are easy to use and quicker to absorb than an ointment. In order to keep the right consistency they contain emulsifiers. They also contain preservatives. These extra ingredients can cause stinging and allergic reactions in some people. Examples are: Epimax ExCetra cream, Zerocream cream.

Some creams contain an antimicrobial to help treat skin infections and reduce repeated infections. An example of such a product is Dermol cream.

**Gels** are oil and water products, but the way they are formulated produces a jelly-like consistency. When applied to the skin the oil and water separate which produces a moisturising and cooling effect. An example is Zerodouble gel.

**Lotions** have a higher water content than creams. This makes them easier to apply but less moisturising than other emollients.

Some lotions contain an antimicrobial to help treat skin infections and reduce repeated infections. An example of such a product is Dermol lotion.

## Soap Substitutes

Soap products should not be used on the skin in people with dry skin conditions as they strip the skin of its natural oils and dry it out even more. An emollient should be used instead. They can either be applied prior to bathing if the skin stings when in contact with water or during bathing to cleanse the skin.

People with dry hands should use an emollient as a soap substitute every time they wash their hands. All of the products mentioned so far apart from Zerodouble Gel can be used as a soap substitute.