

Emollients: updated safety advice

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Emollients

Emollients are moisturising treatments applied directly to the skin to soothe and hydrate it. They cover the skin with a protective film to trap in moisture.

Emollients are often used to help manage dry, itchy or scaly skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis and ichthyosis. They help prevent patches of inflammation and flare-ups of these conditions.

When to apply emollients

Emollients can be applied as often as you like to keep the skin well moisturised and in good condition. Ideally, this should be done at least three or four times a day.

It is especially important to regularly apply an emollient to your hands and face, or as directed by your clinician. This is because they are exposed to the elements more than any other part of your body..

Emollients are best applied after washing your hands, taking a bath or showering because this is when the skin most needs moisture.

The emollient should be applied as soon as you have patted your skin dry to make sure it is properly absorbed.

General safety advice – using emollients

Be careful not to slip when using emollients in a bath or shower, or on a tiled floor. Protect the floor with a non-slip mat, towel or sheet. Wear protective gloves, wash your bath or shower afterwards with hot water and washing up liquid, then dry with a kitchen towel.

Be careful when using aqueous cream. It can cause burning, stinging, itching and redness for some people, especially children with atopic eczema. Read more information about the safety of aqueous cream from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Updated fire safety advice about emollients

With regular use, it is possible for **emollient residue** to build-up on dressings, clothing and bedding, which has been associated with a risk of severe and fatal burns.

Emollient products are not flammable themselves, but will act as an 'accelerant' in the presence of heat or flames. This increases the speed of ignition and intensity of a fire when fabric with emollient residue dried on it is ignited. Emollients are suspected of contributing to the speed and intensity of fires that have resulted in fatal burns injury.

The risk of severe and fatal burns cannot be excluded with paraffin-free emollients. A similar risk may apply to other products that are applied to the skin over large body areas or in large volumes for repeated use for more than a few days.

Washing clothing or fabric at a high temperature may reduce emollient build-up but will not remove it completely.

When using emollients:

- **Do not smoke**
- **Do not go near any naked flames**
- **Do not go near anyone who is smoking or using a naked flame**
- **Do change clothing or bedding regularly because emollients soak into fabric and can become a fire hazard**

Further information

For more information please read the information sheet that comes with your medication.

Emollients remain an effective treatment for chronic dry skin conditions and it is important to use them as directed by your doctor or clinician. If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact your community pharmacist for advice in the first instance, or your GP.

Fire safety in the home

The Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service has information about fire safety at home on their website, including information about eligibility for a free home fire safety visit.

To find out more, visit the [Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service website](#), or call **0800 05 02 999** to speak to a community safety team member to find out whether you are eligible for a free home fire safety visit.

A fire service [home safety booklet](#) is available and can be downloaded from the fire service website.

Any fire incidents associated with emollients or other skin care products should be reported to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) which can be done via their website <https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>, or by calling the freephone number 0800 731 6789 (10am to 2pm, Monday-Friday only), or by writing to the following address:

Freepost Yellow Card Scheme,
MHRA,
10 South Colonnade,
Canary Wharf,
London
E14 4PU

References

Drug Safety Update volume 12, issue 5: December 2018: 3.

Accessed [online](#) 23 December 2019

[Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service website](#) (Safety at home) accessed 23 December 2019

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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