

## Emollient prescribing for dry skin conditions (July 2018)

- There is a lack of good quality evidence comparing emollients. Choice of emollient depends on the individual, remembering that products acceptable to one patient may be unacceptable to another.
- Patients should use the cheapest emollient that is effective, cosmetically acceptable and which they are prepared to use regularly.
- On first presentation, prescribe / supply a trial of several emollients (of small pack size), so that the person can make an informed choice as to which suits them best. Often, several different emollients will be required (e.g. for different areas of skin, different stages of flare, or for use in different locations).
- Once an effective emollient has been established, you should prescribe leave-on emollients in large quantities (250–500 g weekly).
- Show children and their parents or carers how to apply emollients.
- **Review repeat prescriptions at least once a year.**

Stage of prescribing	Product	
<b>First Line</b> <i>(suitable for all prescribers)</i>	Hydromol Ointment Zerobase Cream Zeroderm Ointment QV Cream Cetraben Zerodouble Gel Hydromol Intensive (only for ichthyotic conditions otherwise 3 <sup>rd</sup> line) Calmurid (only for ichthyotic conditions otherwise 3 <sup>rd</sup> line)	
<b>Second Line</b>	Dermol Cream Balneum Cream (contains fragrance) Emollin Spray Hydromol Cream (this is a humectant and so less is used) Zeroneum (contains fragrance) Ultrabase (contains rose fragrance)	
<b>Third Line</b> <i>(prescribing usually reserved for dermatology services)</i>	Zeroveen Cream Balneum Plus Aveeno (ACBS) Hydromol Intensive Calmurid	
<b>Wash / Soap Substitute</b>	<u>First choice:</u> Dermol 500 Hydromol Ointment Zerodouble Gel	<u>Second choice:</u> Doublebase gel
<b>Shampoo</b>	Dermax Ketoconazole Ceanal	Capasal T-Gel

References:

NICE Guidance (CG57) – [Atopic Eczema in Children](#)

CKS [http://www.cks.nhs.uk/eczema\\_atopic](http://www.cks.nhs.uk/eczema_atopic)

NICE Guidance (QS44) - [Atopic eczema in children](#)

PrescQIPP (2015) – [Cost effective prescribing of emollients](#)

There is no such thing as an ideal emollient. Various factors namely severity of dermatological condition, composition of the emollient, use of emollient as a soap substitute, patient preference, emollients tried in the past and cost need to be considered when prescribing emollients.

The greasier an emollient is the more effective it is at retaining hydration within the skin.

Various emollients and their use on specific skin types is listed in the table below:

**Table 1: Emollients and skin types<sup>1</sup>**

Emollient type	Comments
<i>Lotions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reapplication needed frequently on very dry skin.</li> <li>- Good for very mild dry skin and face</li> <li>- Spreads easily as contains more water</li> </ul>
<i>Creams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More effective than mild emollients but less greasy</li> <li>- Mixture of water and fat. Well absorbed</li> </ul>
<i>Ointments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Oily preparation – hence greasy</li> <li>- No preservatives – lower chance of skin irritation than creams or lotions</li> <li>- Useful for very dry and thickened skin</li> </ul>

Patient sensitivities to excipients must be checked when prescribing emollients. Pump dispensers reduce the risk of antimicrobial contamination.

Antimicrobial containing emollients are recommended in patients with recurrent infections. Recurrent infection can be a factor in relapse of dermatological condition. Urea containing emollients may be reserved for patients as last line agents where standard emollients have been ineffective.

The table below provides a guide to suitable quantities for prescribing emollients in a standard adult patient

**Table 2: Suitable quantities of emollients for prescribing in adults<sup>1,2</sup>**

Body site	Creams or ointments		Lotions	
	One week supply	One month supply	One week supply	One month supply
Face	15-30g	60-120g	100ml	400ml
Both hands	25-50g	100-200g	200ml	800ml
Scalp	50-100g	200-400g	200ml	800ml
Both arms or legs	100-200g	400-800g	200ml	800ml
Trunk	400g	1600g	500ml	2000ml
Groins and genitalia	15-25g	60-100g	100ml	400ml

For children, please halve the above quantities<sup>1,2</sup>.

One fingertip unit (0.5g) is the amount of cream or ointment squeezed out from the tip of the adult index finger to first crease of the finger<sup>2</sup>. 0.5g of cream or ointment is enough to cover an area that is twice that of the flat adult palm<sup>2</sup>.

References

1. Barking and Dagenham, Havering & Redbridge CCGs [Emollient Guidelines and Formulary](#) July 2016.
2. Dorset CCG. [In Focus: Emollients](#). July 2017