

Capsaicin cream

Information and advice for patients

Pain Management

What is capsaicin cream?

Capsaicin cream is a cream that reduces sensitivity to pain. Capsaicin is the active ingredient in chilli peppers. When the cream is applied to the skin it reduces a chemical that transmits pain.

What is the benefit of capsaicin cream?

The benefit of capsaicin cream is that it can temporarily reduce pain and, if used regularly, can provide prolonged pain relief. We recommend using capsaicin cream for at least 4 – 6 continuous weeks to see how well it works for you.

What are the risks of using capsaicin cream?

The risk of using capsaicin cream is that it can cause an intense burning sensation in the area it has been applied to. However this tends to ease off the more you use the cream.

The cream can also cause coughing, sneezing, eye irritation and breathing problems but these effects are rare.

If you experience any of these side effects and are concerned please see your GP.

What are the risks of not using the cream?

The risk of not using capsaicin cream is that you won't experience the benefit it can give.

Are there any alternatives to the cream?

There are other medications to relieve pain that may be suitable for you if capsaicin cream is not effective or you do not wish to use it. For information about suitable alternatives please speak to your doctor.

How to use the cream

Before using the cream for the first time please read the manufacturers leaflet that comes with it.

The cream is available in two strengths:

- 0.025% capsaicin cream (Zacin®)
- 0.075% capsaicin cream (Axsain®)

Your doctor will prescribe the appropriate strength for you. A small amount of the cream should be applied over areas of pain 3 – 4 times a day.

You may want to wear gloves when applying the cream to protect your hands. If not, then please wash your hands thoroughly immediately after applying it.

When you run out of capsaicin cream your GP will be able to give you a prescription for more if you need it.

Precautions

- Do not use the cream an hour before or after having a bath or shower as this will intensify the burning sensation caused by the cream.
- Do not use a TENS machine or heat pads over the area for an hour after applying the cream.
- Do not get capsaicin cream in your eyes, mouth or nose.
- Do not apply the cream to broken or inflamed skin.
- Do not apply tight bandages over the area the cream has been applied to.
- If you forget to use the cream don't worry – just leave that dose and apply the next dose at the normal scheduled time.
- Make sure any health professionals you see are aware that you are using the cream.
- Do not use the cream after its expiry date.

Storing the cream

Make sure you store the cream with the lid on, out of reach and sight of children. The cream should be stored below 25°C but should not be kept in the fridge.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about this treatment please contact:

Pain Management

0121 507 4866

Monday – Friday, 9am – 4pm

If you have any problems outside these times, or are experiencing severe side effects, please contact your GP.

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website www.swbh.nhs.uk, follow us on X @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

Derry S, Rice ASC, Cole P, Tan T, Moore RA. Topical capsaicin (high concentration) for chronic neuropathic pain in adults. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2017, Issue 1. Art. No.: CD007393. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD007393.pub4. Accessed 14 March 2024.

British National Formulary (2021) Capsaicin. Available at: <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/drug/capsaicin.html> (Accessed: 14 March 2024).

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A Teaching Trust of The University of Birmingham

Incorporating the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital, City Health Campus, Sandwell Health Campus and Rowley Regis Hospital.

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ML5206

Issue Date: March 2024

Review Date: March 2027