

## What is capsaicin cream?

Capsaicin occurs naturally in plants, it is the active ingredient in chilli peppers. It is not known exactly how the cream works. When the cream is applied to the skin it can reduce the chemicals that transmit pain. The massaging action on your skin when you apply the cream can be beneficial too.

Capsaicin cream can be used for different types of pain. It can be used for pain such as osteoarthritis of the joints or neuropathic (nerve) pain. Nerve pain from injury or damage to nerves is described as burning, stabbing, stinging, shooting, aching or electric shock-like.

It is usual to start with the lowest strength cream 0.025% known as Zacin®.

## How to use capsaicin cream

Apply a pea sized amount of cream to the painful area three or four times a day. Gently rub the cream in until there is none left on the surface of your skin. There should be a gap of at least 4 hours between applications.

Wash your hands carefully straight after applying the cream. If the hands are the area you are treating then wash your hands 30 minutes after applying the cream.

## Precautions

- **Avoid** applying just before or after a hot shower or bath as this may increase the burning sensation
- **Avoid** contact with eyes, mucous membranes and broken skin
- **Avoid** inhaling the vapour of the cream
- **Do not** use a TENS machine or heat pads over the area for an hour after applying the cream
- **Do not** apply tight bandages over the area the cream has been applied to

## How long should I use capsaicin cream for?

It may take a few weeks before you notice any benefit from the capsaicin cream. It is recommended that you apply the cream regularly for 4-6 weeks before deciding if it is having any benefit.

If you are getting benefit then carry on using the cream while your pain is still a problem. This should be reviewed every few months with your doctor, pain specialist or pharmacist.

## Are there any side effects?

All medicines can cause side effects but not everyone will get them. There is a full list in the patient information sheet with your prescription.

Capsaicin cream can cause a brief burning feeling when it is applied. This is more likely if:

- You have applied too much cream
- The cream is applied just before or after a hot bath or shower
- You are applying it less than 3 or 4 times a day

This will usually wear off after continued use. Occasionally people have to discontinue the treatment because they find that the burning sensation is unbearable.

Capsaicin cream can cause skin irritation. If a rash develops then stop using the cream.

When capsaicin cream is applied, occasionally the vapour can cause brief irritation to the eyes, nose or throat. It may cause watery eyes, runny nose, coughing, sneezing. These symptoms are usually mild and go away. Occasionally breathing in the vapour can cause breathlessness, or worsen asthma.

If side effects go on and become a problem or you have others not expected then speak to your doctor, pain specialist or pharmacist.

## Medication in chronic pain

The benefit from taking medication should always be more than any side effects you may have. Only **you**

- know how bad your pain is
- are able to say if your medicine is helping
- know what side effects you are having

It may take a few weeks or several trials of different medications to find the best combination for you and your pain. It may help to keep a diary of your pain and other symptoms. Side effects often become less once you have been on a medicine for a few days.

Please read the patient information sheet given with each medication. It gives more information about the medicine and any side effects.

You can discuss your pain medication with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist. They can give you advice on which pain medicines may help. They can help you find the best way to take your medicines. They can advise you on putting your dose up safely if your pain is worse and on taking less medication safely when your pain is less.

If your medicine is not helping you may not need to take it. Please talk to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist first. Some pain medicines should not be stopped suddenly.

Do not share or take other peoples medication. Always advise your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about any other medication or products you are taking for chronic pain. This includes anything bought from the pharmacy, herbal supplements or non- prescribed medicines.

**Understanding how your medications work may help you to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects.**

Issue No. 2

Date of Issue: July 2018

Review Date: July 2020



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## Patient Information Leaflet



GETTING YOU ON TRACK TO RECOVERY

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NHS Fife SMS text service number 07805800005 is available for people who have a hearing or speech impairment.

To find out more about accessible formats contact:  
[fife-UHB.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.net](mailto:fife-UHB.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.net) or phone 01592 729130