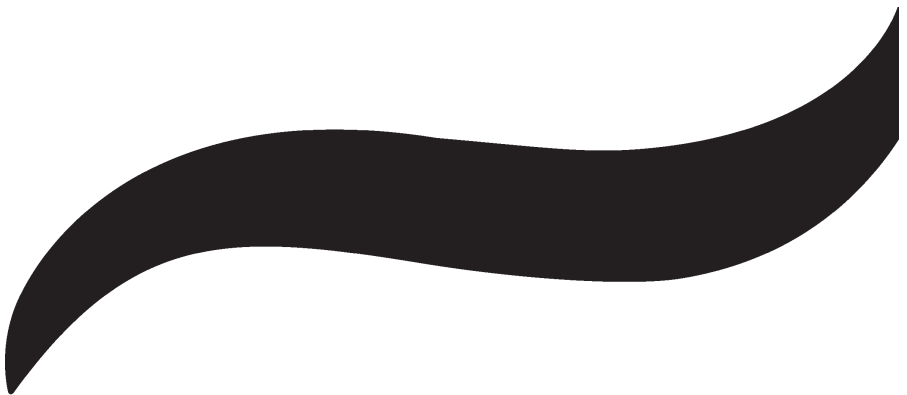




# Capsaicin Cream

Information for patients  
Prescribing Management Team  
Kirklands Hospital



## **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 but when applied to the skin it can reduce the chemicals that transmit pain.

## **WHAT CAN CAPSAICIN CREAM BE USED FOR?**

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.

## **HOW TO USE CAPSAICIN CREAM**

It is usual to start with the lowest strength cream 0.025% known as Zacin<sup>®</sup>, however the different strengths have different indications. The 0.025% strength is indicated for osteoarthritis and 0.075% (Axsain<sup>®</sup>) is indicated for neuralgia and painful diabetic peripheral polyneuropathy.

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. The massaging action on your skin when you apply the cream can be beneficial too. There should be a gap of at least four hours between applications.

Wash your hands immediately after applying the cream. If you are applying the cream to your hands as part of your treatment you should wash your hands 30 minutes after applying the cream.

## **PRECAUTIONS**

- ❖ Do not apply 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 WILL I HAVE TO 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 three or four times a day

This will usually wear off after continued use. Occasionally, people have to discontinue the treatment because they are unable to tolerate the burning sensation. Capsaicin cream can cause skin irritation. If a rash develops then stop using the cream.

### **Occasionally the vapour can cause:**

- ❖ Brief irritation to the eyes, nose or throat.
- ❖ It may cause watery eyes, runny nose, coughing, sneezing.
- ❖ Breathing in the vapour can cause breathlessness, or worsen asthma

### **These symptoms are usually mild and go away.**

You should speak to your doctor, pain specialist or pharmacist if you are worried about these or any other effects you think are to do with this treatment.

## MEDICATION IN CHRONIC PAIN

The benefit from taking medication should always be more than any side effects you may experience. 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 to manage 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.

It may be several days or weeks before you notice that a new medicine is making a difference.

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
- ❖ help you find the best way to take your medicines advise you on putting your dose up safely if your pain is worse
- ❖ Advise you 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.

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

Do not use or take other peoples medication. Always tell 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.

We hope you found this information leaflet helpful. This information is not intended to replace your Doctor's advice. If you have any comments about the content, please let us know. This can be done by filling in the comment section, and sending it to the Prescribing Management Team at the address listed below, or by email.

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