

Capsaicin cream

This leaflet is for patients being prescribed capsaicin cream to manage pain.

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. The recommendation for using capsaicin cream is at least 1-2 continuous weeks to see how well it works for you.

What do I need to know before starting capsaicin cream?

- 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.

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.

How to apply the capsaicin 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.

Are there any alternatives to the capsaicin 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.

Storing the capsaicin 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.

Any queries?

If you have any concerns regarding this treatment, please contact:

Pain Management Unit 0118 322 8261 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm).

Out of hours/weekends: please contact your GP or the out of hours service for advice.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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Next review due: January 2025