

Position Statement: Self-care with Emollients and Soap Substitutes

As part of its self-care strategy, in line with [National Guidance](#), NHS Nottingham & Nottinghamshire ICB does not support the routine prescribing of emollients for the treatment of mild dry skin with no diagnosed dermatological condition (examples of a diagnosed dermatological condition includes: severe dermatitis, eczema or psoriasis). Prescribing may be appropriate where there is significant risk to skin integrity.

Those patients without a diagnosed dermatological condition requesting a general skin moisturiser / emollient should be advised to purchase these items over the counter (OTC).

Bath additives and shower gels are *not* recommended for prescribing in any circumstances due to lack of evidence of efficacy.

Recommendations:

- All patients currently prescribed an emollient for mild dry skin, for which there is no documented dermatological condition (as defined above), should be reviewed with a view to stopping prescribing and recommending an OTC product for self-care.
- Prescribers should advise patients on safe and effective self-care measures, directing them to appropriate sources of information and patient information leaflets (e.g. [The NHS Website](#), [Notts APC Mild Dry Skin Self-Care Leaflet](#) and [The Self Care Forum](#)).
- See [Notts APC Emollient Formulary](#) for prescribing advice and more information on self-care.
- Patients can seek advice directly with the Community Pharmacist or via referral from the GP Surgery using the minor illness self-care advice and over the counter sales part of Pharmacy First. The advantage of the Pharmacy First referral is that the outcome of the consultation is sent to the GP surgery so that this can be included in the GP patient record.

Consider prescribing if:

- The patient meets one or more of the general exception criteria ([appendix 1](#)) including prescribing for those where the clinician considers that their ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of medical, mental health or significant social vulnerability to the extent that the patient's health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. Being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance. Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.
- There is a licensing restriction on the sale of OTC medication. Most restrictions can be checked using the summary of product characteristics, available at www.medicines.org.uk.
- The patient has moderate or severe dry skin.

Rationale:

- Mild dry skin has been classified as appropriate for self-care by NHS England following the national consultation on conditions for which OTC items should not be routinely prescribed.
- Patients with mild dry skin can be successfully managed using over the counter products on a long-term basis.

Recommendations for prescribing emollients for patients with a diagnosed dermatological condition:

- Existing patients prescribed a non-formulary emollient for a diagnosed skin condition should be reviewed with a view to trialling a preferred formulary emollient after discussion with the patient – see [Notts APC Emollient Formulary](#).
- Where prescribing is appropriate, prescribers should select the formulary option with the lowest acquisition cost wherever possible depending on severity of symptoms, patient preference and site of application.
- Patients should be advised to thoroughly wash any surface, clothing and bedding coming into contact with emollients due to the risk of severe and fatal burns (even after washing, residual emollient may remain). See [MHRA Drug Safety Update May 2021](#) and [patient information leaflet](#).

Bath additives and shower gels:

- Bath additives and shower gels are *not* recommended for prescribing in any circumstances due to lack of evidence of efficacy. Most topical emollients can be used as a soap substitute. Care must be taken when using emollients in the bath as they may make surfaces slippery.

Any patient queries or complaints should be directed to the Patient Experience Team on 0115 883 9570 or email nnicb-nn.patientexperience@nhs.net.

References:

NHS England: Conditions for which over the counter items should not be routinely prescribed in Primary Care: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/policy-guidance-conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed-in-primary-care/> (accessed online March 2023).

Appendix 1 – General Exceptions to Self-Care

The following are scenarios where [NHSE guidance](#) states that patients should continue to have their treatments prescribed for those conditions where general exceptions apply:

- Individual patients where the clinician considers that their ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of medical, mental health or significant social vulnerability to the extent that their health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. To note that being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance. Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.
- Patients prescribed an OTC treatment for a long-term condition (e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or treatments for inflammatory bowel disease).
- For the treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses (e.g. severe migraines that are unresponsive to OTC medicines).
- For those patients that have symptoms that suggest the condition is not minor (i.e. those with red flag symptoms for example indigestion with very bad pain.)
- Treatment for complex patients (e.g. immunosuppressed patients).
- Patients on prescription only treatments.
- Patients prescribed OTC products to treat an adverse effect or symptom of a more complex illness and/or prescription only medications should continue to have these products prescribed on the NHS.
- Circumstances where the product licence doesn't allow the product to be sold over the counter to certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies, children and/or women who are pregnant or breast-feeding. Community Pharmacists will be aware of what these are and can advise accordingly.
- Patients with a minor condition suitable for self-care that has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an OTC product.
- Patients where the clinician considers that the presenting symptom is due to a condition that would not be considered a minor condition.
- Circumstances where the prescriber believes that in their clinical judgement, exceptional circumstances exist that warrant deviation from the recommendation to self-care.