

Barnsley emollient formulary choices guidance

A prescription for the treatment of mild dry skin should not routinely be offered in primary care as the condition is appropriate for self-care and should be purchased over the counter. See the Barnsley [self-care](#) guidance and [NHS England guidance](#) for further information.

Rationale for prescribing emollients^{1,2,3}

- Emollients should **only be prescribed for the management of diagnosed dermatological conditions** e.g. eczema, psoriasis etc. If there is no diagnosed condition or the symptoms are mild e.g. contact dermatitis then the patient should be advised to purchase over the counter.
- Emollients require frequent application to reduce the quantity of topical steroids and other agents needed to manage the condition and keep the skin clear.
- In line with national guidance, bath additives and shower emollients should not be routinely prescribed in primary care. Bath additives and shower emollients are not included within this guidance. Refer to the Barnsley APC position statement and NHS England guidance for further information.

Guidelines for prescribing^{4,5}

The choice of an appropriate emollient will depend on the severity of the condition (a stepped approach), patient preference and site of application. Management can then be stepped up or down, according to the severity of symptoms, with the addition of other emollient types when needed. For example, a patient may usually apply a cream or gel as more cosmetically acceptable but when they have a flare up require a greasier emollient such as an ointment preparation.

- For newly diagnosed patients – offer a 1st line formulary choice with low acquisition cost from the table below.
- For existing patients prescribed a non-formulary or high acquisition cost product with a diagnosed dermatological condition - review choice of emollient and trial a suitable alternative from the table below.
- For existing patients prescribed an emollient with no dermatological diagnosis – review patient and recommend a suitable preparation that may be purchased over the counter.

Other prescribing recommendations to consider⁵:

- Always treat the whole person when prescribing for dermatological conditions and bear in mind external influences, environmental factors, allergies, irritants and psychological welfare (e.g. candles, plug-ins, lack of sleep due to itching).
- The majority of creams, ointments and some gels contain irritants such as cetostearyl alcohol. These products are not suitable for use around the eyes. Please see the table for further information about formulary products.
- People with eczema should be advised to wash with a regular leave-on emollient as a soap substitute. Note that leave-on emollients may make surfaces slippery. Please refer to the guide below for choices.
- For detailed guidance refer to [NICE CG57](#) Management of atopic eczema in children from birth up to the age of 12 years.
- Fire hazard with emollients: Bandages, dressings, bedding and clothing in contact with paraffin-based products are easily ignited with a naked flame or cigarette. Data suggests, there is also a risk with paraffin-free emollients. Advise patients to keep away from fire and flames and not to smoke when using these preparations. Note that washing even at high temperatures may not remove all of the products from clothes or bedding. Further information is available via the [MHRA website](#).

- Children with atopic eczema should be prescribed sufficient quantities (250-500g weekly) unperfumed emollients for daily use.
- For information on ACBS criteria restrictions see [BNF](#).
- Further patient information and educational resources may be accessed via [NHS Choices](#), [British Association of Dermatologists \(BAD\)](#), [National Eczema Society](#) and the [Primary Care Dermatological Society \(PCDS\)](#).
- Choices have been made using multiple factors such as safety, cost-effectiveness, waste, available ingredient information, supply availability and impact on [greener NHS initiative](#).
- It is the prescribers' responsibility to choose an appropriate emollient for treating the patients' conditions. The tables below should be used together with [Barnsley Area Joint Formulary choices](#).

Choosing an emollient^{6,7}

- **Ointments:** greasiest preparations, being made up of oils or fats and are good for very dry skin. They do not usually contain preservatives and may be more suitable for those with sensitivities but cannot be used on weeping eczema. However, they can exacerbate acne and may cause folliculitis when overused and should not be used where infection is present. Ointments should be applied in the direction of hair growth to reduce the risk of folliculitis. Ointments should be avoided in patient's requiring large quantities of emollient.
- **Creams / Gels:** emulsions of oil and water. Less greasy than ointments and often more cosmetically acceptable.
- **Lotions:** high water content making them easy to spread but less effective moisturiser. Need to be applied more frequently. They may be purchased over the counter for mild dry skin and are useful for very hairy area or areas of damaged skin (such as weeping eczema).

Recommended emollient quantities to prescribe: for further guidance see [BNF](#).

Body site	Cream or ointment- Adult (Based on twice daily application)		Lotion- Adult (Based on twice daily application)	
	One week supply	One month supply	One week supply	One month supply
Face	15-30g	60-120g	100ml	400ml
Both hands	25-50g	100-200g	200ml	800ml
Scalp	50-100g	200-400g	200ml	800ml
Both arms or both legs	100-200g	400-800g	200ml	800ml
Trunk	400g	1600g	500ml	2000ml
Groin and genitalia	15-25g	60-100g	100ml	400ml

Formulary products (compiled using MIMS and manufacturer data)

Always prescribe the smallest pack available as a trial to see if the patient likes the product, does not have an allergic reaction etc.

Information below was constructed using manufacturers advice and available information at the time. Please consult manufacturers product information for any further details.

Abbreviations	Full phrase
WSP	White soft paraffin
LLP	Light liquid paraffin
LP	Liquid paraffin
YSP	Yellow soft paraffin
SLS	Sodium Lauryl sulfate

Prior to prescribing any products from the Aprodern range it may be appropriate to prescribe a trial pack. Note as this has four tubes of cream in it if a patient pays prescription charges it would be advisable to recommend the patient to order a trial pack from the pharmacy to purchase over the counter.

Please note the Zeroderma range of emollients are now reserved for existing patients that have a documented reason in the notes as to why other products are unsuitable or not tolerated, except for Zeroquent® and ZeroAqs® creams for which there is no direct Epimax® equivalent.

A soap substitute is an emollient used instead of soap. Most emollients contain irritants such as cetsostearyl alcohol and contact with eyes should be avoided. If emollients inadvertently come into contact with the eyes, the eyes should be thoroughly rinsed and medical advice sought.

Epimax® ointment and Epimax® Paraffin free ointment [Drug Safety Update July 2024](#).¹⁰ Advice for healthcare professionals

- Do not prescribe or advise use of Epimax® Ointment or Epimax® Paraffin-Free Ointment for application to the face or around the eyes.
- Be aware that if Epimax® Ointment or Epimax® Paraffin-Free Ointment comes into contact with the eyes, patients may present with pain, swelling, redness or watering of eyes, sensitivity to light, blurred vision, burning or grittiness
- Symptoms should resolve with discontinuation of the product around the eyes and can be treated with topical lubricants, topical antibiotics or topical steroids as required
- Healthcare professionals should report suspected adverse reactions associated with Epimax® Ointment or Epimax® Paraffin-Free Ointment via the [MHRA yellow card](#) reporting scheme.

Advice to provide to patients:

- Do not use Epimax® Ointment or Epimax® Paraffin-Free Ointment on your face as it has been reported to cause serious symptoms if it comes into contact with your eyes. It is only for use on the body
- Wash your hands thoroughly after applying Epimax Ointment or Epimax Paraffin Free Ointment and avoid touching your eyes after using these products
- If the product accidentally gets into your eyes, rinse well with water and seek medical advice

Ointments (Greasy/ Very greasy)

For very dry skin.

Formulary choice	Product*	Cost per 500g	Lipid concentration	Benzyl alcohol free	Phenoxy-ethanol free	Fragrance free	Lanolin free	SLS free	Cetostearyl alcohol free	Body wash*	Bath additive	Paraben free	Suitable from birth	Paraffin free	Fully recyclable	Vegan
1st Line	Fifty-50 ointment	£3.92	WSP 50%/ LP 50%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓
2nd Line	AproDerm® ointment	£3.95	WSP 95%/ LP 5%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	✓
Alternatives	Zeroderm® ointment*	£4.29	WSP 30%/ LP 40%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓
	Epimax ointment (avoid application to the face or around eyes)	£3.13	YSP 30%/LP 40%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓
	Epimax® paraffin-free ointment** (avoid application to the face or around eyes)	£4.99	Polyoxyethylene hydrogenated castor oil 38% w/w	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓

NPSA alert: patients who require large quantities of emollient (100g or more) should use a water-based product (e.g. cream or lotion) rather than a paraffin based one (e.g. ointment) to reduce the fire risk'. Paraffin free ointment may be considered in this cohort of patients (including patients using oxygen therapy).

* Zeroderm® ointment is only suitable from 1 year, unless with advice of a HCP

** Epimax paraffin free ointment is restricted for use in patients with documented paraffin sensitivity, patients using oxygen therapy or requiring large quantities of emollient ointment.

Creams Emulsions of oil and water. Less greasy than ointments and often more cosmetically acceptable

Formulary Choice (choose the most appropriate ingredients)	Product	Cost per 500g /ml	Lipid concentration	Benzyl alcohol free	Phenoxy-ethanol free	Fragrance free	Lanolin free	SLS free	Cetostearyl alcohol free	Body wash*	Bath additive	Paraben free	Suitable from birth	Paraffin free	Fully recyclable	Vegan
	Epimax® original	£2.67	WSP 15%/ LP 6%	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
	Epimax® moisturising cream	£2.99	WSP 14.5%/LP 12.6%/Lanolin 1%	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X (1 month)	X	✓	X
	Epimax® excetra	£3.09	WSP 13.2%/ LP 10.5%	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
	Epimax® oatmeal cream	£3.10	Avena sativa (oat) kernel flour	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X (3 months)	X	✓	✓
Alternatives	AproDerm® emollient cream	£4.95	WSP 15%/LP 6%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	✓
	Zerocream® cream*	£5.58	WSP 10%/ LP 11%/Lanolin	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X
	Zerobase® cream*	£5.58	WSP 10%/LP 11%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X
	Zeroguent® cream* (contains peanut and soya)	£7.32	WSP 4%/LLP 8%/Soya bean oil 5%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X

* Zerocream®, Zeroguent® and Zerobase® are only suitable from 1 year, unless with advice of an HCP

Gels Emulsions of oil and water. Less greasy than ointments and often more cosmetically acceptable.

Formulary choice	Product	Cost per 500g	Lipid concentration	Benzyl alcohol free	Phenoxy-ethanol free	Fragrance free	Lanolin free	SLS free	Cetostearyl alcohol free	Body wash*	Bath additive	Paraben free	Suitable from birth	Paraffin free	Fully recyclable	Vegan
1st line	Epimax® isomol gel	£3.08	LP15% / Isopropyl myristate 15%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓
2nd Line	Aproderm® gel	£3.99	LP 15% / Isopropyl Myristate 15%	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	✓
Alternatives	Zerodouble® gel*	£5.14	LP 15% / Isopropyl Myristate 15%	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	✓

* Zerodouble® is only suitable from 1 year, unless with advice of a HCP

Lotions

Easy to spread due to high water content but less effective as emollients and need very frequent application.

Formulary choice	Product	Cost per 500g	Lipid concentration	Benzyl alcohol free	Phenoxy-ethanol free	Fragrance free	Lanolin free	SLS free	Cetostearyl alcohol free	Body wash	Bath additive	Paraben free	Suitable from birth	Paraffin free	Fully recyclable	Vegan
1st line	Miclaro® oat lotion	£3.99	Avena Sativa Kernel Flour 1%/WSP	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	X (3 months onwards)	X	X	X
2nd Line	QV® skin lotion	£5.47	Petrolatum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	✓

Colloidal oat emollients

For light hydration. Useful for patients with sensitive skin.

Formulary choice	Product	Cost per 500g	Lipid concentration	Benzyl alcohol free	Phenoxy-ethanol free	Fragrance free	Lanolin free	SLS free	Cetostearyl alcohol free	Body wash*	Bath additive	Paraben free	Suitable from birth	Paraffin free	Fully recyclable	Vegan
1st line	Epimax® oatmeal cream	£3.99	Avena Sativa Kernel Flour 0.75% WS 3.5%/LP	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X (3 months onwards)	X	✓	X
2nd line	Miclaro® oat cream	£3.99	Avena Sativa Kernel Flour 1%/WSP/LP	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X (3 months onwards)	X	X	X
Alternatives	Aproderm® colloidal oat cream*	£5.80	Avena Sativa Kernel Flour 1%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
	Zeroveen® cream**	£6.13	Avena Sativa Kernel flour, glycerol 12.6%, LP 6%,	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓

* Aproderm colloidal oat cream is the only formulary benzy alcohol free emollient for allergic patients

**Zeroveen® is only suitable from 1 year, unless with advice of a HCP

Paraffin-Free emollients

Only to be prescribed where specifically indicated for paraffin sensitive patients, patients using oxygen therapy or patients requiring large quantities of emollient therapy.

Formulary choice	Product	Cost per 500g	Lipid concentration	Benzyl alcohol free	Phenoxy-ethanol free	Fragrance free	Lanolin free	SLS	Cetostearyl alcohol free	Body Wash	Bath additive	Paraben free	Suitable from birth	Paraffin free	Fully recyclable	Vegan
	Epimax® paraffin free ointment (avoid application to the face or around eyes)	£4.99	Polyoxy-methylene hydrogenated castor oil 38% w/w	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
	Aproderm® colloidal oat cream	£5.80	Avena Sativa Kernel Flour 1%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	✓

References

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Development Process

This guideline was ratified by the Barnsley Area Prescribing Committee on 11th October 2023. Minor Update October 2024. It is due for review in October 2026. Minor update ratified at Barnsley APC 13th November 2024.