

# Capsaicin Cream

## Patient Information

Pain Service

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## What is capsaicin treatment?

Capsaicin is a substance that is derived from red-hot chilli peppers. It is available as a cream in two different strengths – 0.075% and 0.025%. The stronger cream (also called Axsain) is licensed for use in post-herpetic neuralgia (to be applied after the rash has healed) and painful diabetic neuropathy. The weaker cream (also called Zacin) is licensed for use in the symptomatic relief of osteoarthritis.

## How does it work?

The capsaicin is thought to work by decreasing the amount of pain transmitting chemical from the nerve cells in the area where you are experiencing your pain. Initially this causes a burning or stinging sensation, which some people can find unpleasant. This burning or stinging sensation happens because the capsaicin causes the pain-transmitting chemical to be released into the skin from the nerves and the body senses this as burning or stinging.

It is also thought that the capsaicin is absorbed by nerve cells, is transported all the way to the spinal cord and decreases the amount of pain transmitting chemical that is sent on to the brain. It takes quite some time for the drug to move to the spinal cord – therefore we recommend that you apply the cream for at least 6 weeks before deciding to give up, if you are not having any benefit. If you are getting benefit then it is reasonable to carry on applying it as long as you like.

## How do I use the capsaicin cream?

It is really simple to use, you apply it to the area where you are feeling the pain. A small amount should be gently rubbed into the painful area. At the beginning you should apply it 4 times a day. Applying it less often will tend to make it more uncomfortable on each application. The cream should not be applied to inflamed or broken skin. Always wash your hands after applying the cream because you will find it very unpleasant if you rub your eyes, nose or mouth without doing so.

## Benefits

Unfortunately we cannot guarantee you will gain benefit from this drug.

## Alternatives

Your pain specialist will have discussed alternatives with you in your consultation; these could be either, medicines, injections or physical therapies. Every patient is unique and therefore alternatives cannot be given on an information leaflet as not all treatments are suitable for everyone.

## What are the side effects?

Unfortunately there are some side effects. The main one is stinging/burning on application. This tends to be more of a problem for patients with the stronger cream. The sensation does wear off in most people after several weeks of use, and 90% of people don't feel any such sensation by 12 weeks, and most of the remainder find it bearable.

Occasionally people have to discontinue the treatment because they find that the stinging sensation is unbearable. Also skin irritation can occur, so if a rash develops, stop using the cream.

## What can I do to make the application of the cream more bearable?

These side effects are minor, and many patients tolerate them because of the improvement they have in their pain relief.

To make initial application of the stronger cream (Axsain) more bearable, your pain clinic doctor may give you some anaesthetic cream to apply to the area where you are later going to apply the capsaicin ointment.

This cream (called EMLA) should be applied for at least one hour, before applying the capsaicin ointment. The EMLA cream needs to be kept under an occlusive dressing for it to work properly, before being removed. It can make the skin where it is applied paler, or redder or indeed more swollen. This can become a problem with prolonged use, so normally you are given a two week supply, by which time hopefully your skin will have become used to the capsaicin ointment and you will no longer need the EMLA.

## Contact information

If you have any questions please contact the Pain Management Team on?  
Telephone: **01942 773099**.

It is very important that you attend any appointments made for you with either, the Doctor; Nurse; Physiotherapist; Occupational therapist or the Psychologist. If you cannot attend please cancel the appointment and re-arrange, failure to cancel will result in discharge from the pain service and you will need to be re referred by your GP if you wish to be seen again.

Please use this space to write notes/reminders.

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## Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

## Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

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## Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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## How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: [https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient\\_information/leaflets](https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient_information/leaflets)

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This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in department/ward.

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