

Information for Adult Patients who are Prescribed  
**Capsaicin Cream**  
For the Treatment of Pain



This information is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. We advise you to read the manufacturer's information for patients, which your pharmacist will supply with your medicine. Please keep all medicines away from children, vulnerable adults or pets.

## **Why have I been prescribed capsaicin cream?**

Capsaicin cream is used to treat some types of persistent pain. It is especially good for areas where it is particularly sensitive to touch.

Capsaicin cream is licensed for use in osteoarthritis (**zacin 0.025%**) or pain from shingles (**axsain 0.075%**). It can also be used to treat other types of neuropathic (nerve) pain.

## **How does capsaicin cream work?**

Capsaicin cream is prepared from an extract of chilli peppers and works by being absorbed through the skin into the painful area and desensitising the nerve endings that send pain messages to the brain.

## **How long will it take to work?**

Every patient is different. It can take up to 6 weeks for pain relief.

## **When should I use it?**

You should apply capsaicin cream regularly, four times a day, with a gap of at least 4 hours between each application.

With time and regular applications, the nerve endings will become more desensitised and the pain killing effect will increase. It can take up to 6 weeks to achieve its full effect.

## How is capsaicin cream applied?

- Apply a pea-sized amount of capsaicin cream to the painful area and gently rub it in so it is no longer visible.
- Avoid contact with eyes, mouth, nose or genitals.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling the capsaicin cream (or use gloves to apply).
- Do not use capsaicin cream on cut, hacked, raw, broken or irritated areas of the skin.
- Do not use tight bandages on top of the cream.
- If the cream causes a very hot or unpleasant sensation stop using it.
- Avoid additional heat in the area where the cream is used e.g. do not use hot water bottles, hot baths or showers.

## What are the possible side effects?

It can cause a brief burning feeling when applied. This tends to happen if you:

- use it less than 3-4 a day
- apply too much cream
- apply the cream after a hot bath or shower.

Rarely, the vapour from the cream can cause brief irritation to the eyes, nose or throat and may make asthma worse.

Please stop using this cream if you develop a skin reaction, rash or if you have been using the cream for 6 weeks and your pain had not reduced.

You can find the full list of potential side effects in the leaflet that comes with the cream.

## **Can I use capsaicin cream and TENS at same time?**

If using TENS and capsaicin cream together, apply the TENS pads first before applying the cream. Avoid trapping any ointment under the TENS pads.

## **Can I take this medication long-term?**

Yes, if it helps. You may wish to stop using the cream every so often to check if your pain is still a problem. If this is something you would like to try then please discuss this with your GP or Pain specialist.

## **Remember!**

- Don't run out of medicine
- Ask for a repeat prescription before your medicine is finished
- If you have any queries you can ask your pharmacist, GP, or NHS 24 (call 111 for free from landlines or mobiles)

For more information about managing chronic pain, please see [www.paindata.org](http://www.paindata.org)