

# Capsaicin 8% patch

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**This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having capsaicin 8% patch to treat your pain and what happens during capsaicin treatment. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.**

## What is capsaicin 8% patch and how does it work?

Capsaicin 8% patch is used alone or in combination with other medicines to treat pain. Capsaicin is a component of chilli peppers which gives their heat sensation.

Capsaicin patch works by blocking receptors on pain-sensing nerves under the skin, which reduces sensitivity to pain. It is applied to the area of skin where you have pain and helps to relieve your symptoms.

## Who is it for?

Capsaicin patch is used for patients who have pain due to damaged nerves in the skin. This type of pain is known as peripheral neuropathic pain (PNP).

PNP is caused by damage to the peripheral nervous system. This is the network of nerves that transmits information between the brain and the rest of body. Damage in these nerves can disrupt the nerve's normal functioning. This may result in pain often described as burning, stabbing, shooting, aching or like an "electric shock".

PNP may happen as a result of:

- complications from certain diseases such as shingles, HIV, and thyroid disorders
- complications of some medicines or,
- nerve damage from an accident, surgery or injury.

## What happens during capsaicin treatment?

We will ask you to attend our clinic where a nurse may mark the most painful areas on your skin with a pen or marker. The nurse may cut the capsaicin patch into smaller pieces to fit the treatment area. They will then place the capsaicin patch on your skin. A bandage or surgical tape or dressing may be put on top of the patch to keep it firmly on your skin. The capsaicin patch will be left on for 30 minutes if you are being treated for nerve pain on the soles of your feet, or for 60 minutes if you are being treated for nerve pain on other parts of your body. After this, the nurse will carefully remove the capsaicin patch. They will then apply a cleansing gel to the skin which will be left on for approximately one minute before being wiped off. The treated area will then be washed gently with soap and water. Your time spent in the clinic may be up to two hours.

## Is the procedure painful and what are the side effects?

During and after the capsaicin treatment, it is usual for the skin to sting, become red or burn for a short while. Your blood pressure may go up because of the temporary reaction to the capsaicin. Other side effects include: itching, bumps, blisters, swelling, dryness, wheals, prickling sensation, inflammation of the skin, increased sensitivity of the skin, skin reaction, irritation and bruising. These side effects are not common and if they do occur, they are generally not serious and wear off within the first seven days.

However, if any of these side effects become serious, or if you experience any other side effects please contact the pain clinic or your GP for advice. Most people will start to feel some pain relief on the first day the capsaicin patch is applied. However, it may take up to 14 days before you feel the maximum benefit.

## How should I prepare for the procedure?

- Take your usual medication before coming to the hospital.
- You can eat and drink as normal.
- You should wear loose fitting clothing over the treatment site and comfortable shoes / flip flops if your feet are being treated.
- The treatment can take up to two hours, so bring along a book or music, plus a snack if you wish.
- If the area is hairy, clip or shave the area at least three days before treatment.
- **Do not** apply creams or moisturizers to the area on the day.

It is very important to tell your doctor or nurse, at least a week before the capsaicin treatment if:

- you are allergic to any medication especially chilli peppers or capsaicin
- you have an infection / broken skin / rash / cut at the treatment site
- you think you might be pregnant or are breast feeding
- you have had a recent heart attack or have unstable hypertension (high blood pressure)
- if you are using DMSO topical medication.

## During the procedure

- **Do not** sniff or inhale close to the capsaicin patch as it may cause sneezing or coughing.
- **Do not** touch a capsaicin patch as it may cause burning or stinging.
- **Do not** touch the treated area and then your eyes, mouth, or other sensitive areas such as broken skin or genitalia as it may cause irritation and pain.
- **Do not** attempt to remove the patch yourself; this will be done for you for safety reasons.
- **Do not** touch capsaicin or other materials (e.g. bandage) that have come into contact with treated areas as it may cause burning or stinging.
- **Do not** use capsaicin on broken skin or open wounds. Your healthcare professional will wear special safety gloves when handling the capsaicin patch or treated skin. If you accidentally touch the capsaicin patch or treated skin, tell a healthcare professional.

## After the procedure

- You can go home shortly after capsaicin therapy and you can drive if you feel up to it.
- You can resume your normal daily activities.
- If the treated area is painful, stinging or burning apply cold compresses to the affected area. You can take your regular painkillers as needed.
- Shower and wash the area as usual with cool or tepid water.
- The treated area may be sensitive to heat. During the first few days following treatment avoid hot

showers/baths, direct sunlight or vigorous exercise.

- You should wash garments that have come into contact with the treated area separately from the rest of your laundry.
- A telephone follow-up appointment will be made in about eight weeks and you will receive notification in the post.

## Can I have further capsaicin therapy?

After eight weeks, you will receive a phone call from one of our nurses as a follow up. A decision will then be made as to whether to repeat the procedure and when. For most people capsaicin treatment is effective and the benefit can be long-lasting. Some people have pain relief for weeks or months. Capsaicin treatment can be repeated when the pain recurs if your doctor feels this is appropriate and effective for you. Capsaicin does not work for everyone.

### Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Pain Management Department on 020 7188 4714 or email [capsaicinclinic@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:capsaicinclinic@gstt.nhs.uk) (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please leave a message and a member of staff will call you back in working hours, or contact your GP or NHS 111.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## **Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

## **Your comments and concerns**

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

## **Language support services**

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

**NHS 111** - Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111

**NHS Choices** – Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust**

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

**t:** 0800 731 0319 **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)

**w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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