

Creams to depigment your skin

This information sheet has been given to you to help answer some of the questions you may have about using depigmenting creams to treat your skin condition. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you. If you would like further information regarding alternative treatments available to treat your condition, please contact your doctor.

What are depigmenting creams?

Depigmenting creams are used to treat areas of skin that are hyperpigmented (darkly coloured). They may contain a combination of different medicines including:

- hydroquinone or monobenzyl ether of hydroquinone – these stop melanocytes (pigmenting cells) in your skin from making melanin. Melanin is the substance that causes pigmentation (natural colouring) of your skin.
- retinoids (including tretinoin and retinoic acid) – these increase the turnover of new skin cells and help the hydroquinone to penetrate the skin.
- corticosteroids (such as hydrocortisone) – these prevent and reduce inflammation of the skin.

Your doctor has chosen the appropriate preparation (strength and combination of active ingredients) to suit your condition.

Taking an unlicensed medicine

There are no licensed depigmenting creams available in the United Kingdom and so a product is purchased from abroad. Because of this, the medicine is known as an unlicensed medicine. The leaflet, **Unlicensed medicines – a guide for patients**, has more information about the use of unlicensed medicines. If you would like a copy, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Alternatively, you can call the Pharmacy Medicines Helpline (contact details are at the end of this leaflet).

How should I apply the cream?

Apply a thin layer of depigmenting cream to the affected area (highly pigmented area) of your skin once or twice daily as directed by your doctor. Ensure that you wash your hands thoroughly before and after application, and ensure that you avoid skin to skin contact with others for an hour after application. The cream should **not** be applied:

- near your eyes or around the eyelid area
- to cut, broken or sunburnt skin
- after shaving or using depilatory agents (hair removers)
- to skin that is affected with a rash.

How long should I use it for?

You may need to use the cream for several months (sometimes longer) before depigmentation occurs. When your skin shows the degree of pigmentation you want, you can stop using the cream on a daily basis and use it as and when it is needed (to maintain the depigmentation).

When the doctor decides that you should stop using the cream, the depigmentation should last for some months if you are using a cream containing hydroquinone. If you are using a cream containing monobenzyl ether of hydroquinone, the effects should last indefinitely.

If after four months your skin does not show any signs of depigmentation, you should see your hospital doctor or GP who will review the therapy.

What should I do if I forget to use the cream?

It is important to apply the treatment as directed by your doctor. However, if you forget, wait until your next scheduled application is due and continue as normal. If you are uncertain or have any doubts, please contact us using the details listed on the back page.

Are there any side effects?

Commonly reported side effects include mild skin irritation and allergic reactions including burning, stinging and dermatitis (inflammation of the skin), dryness and pruritis (itching) of the skin. If you experience any of these effects or other adverse effects which you think may have been caused by application of depigmenting creams, please **stop applying the cream** and contact your hospital doctor or GP.

Are there any interactions between depigmenting creams and my regular medicines or other skin products?

You should **not** apply other treatments to your skin at the **same time** as the depigmenting cream. If you need to use other products on the skin, please wait at least one hour after you have applied the depigmenting cream. This includes applying moisturisers and emollients, foundation and other cosmetics/toiletries to your skin.

Can I use depigmenting creams if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

You should not use depigmenting creams if you are pregnant. Depigmenting creams contain retinoids, which can be absorbed through your skin and cause harm to an unborn baby. If you become pregnant or think you may be pregnant, stop using the cream and contact your doctor for advice. If you are thinking about becoming pregnant, please speak to your doctor.

There is not enough information available on the safety of using depigmenting creams when breastfeeding. If you are breastfeeding, you should therefore not use the cream and should contact your doctor for further advice.

Is there anything else I need to know?

Sunlight on your skin may reverse the effect of the cream. You should therefore avoid excessive exposure to sunlight and avoid all use of sun lamps and sun beds. If you are going to be exposed to direct sunlight, ensure you cover the area and wear sunscreen with a high factor (at least factor 15). You should do this during and following treatment with depigmenting creams.

How should I store the cream?

The cream should be stored at room temperature in a locked cupboard away from children and animals. The cream should only be used by the person for whom it has been prescribed. It should not be used after the expiry date written on the label. Any unused or expired stock should be returned to your pharmacist for disposal.

How do I get further supplies?

You will be given your first prescription by your hospital doctor, and you will need to take this to the outpatient pharmacy for supply. After this, you should contact your GP for a prescription when you are running low. If there are any problems with supply from your GP, you may need to get further supplies from the hospital.

The outpatient pharmacy should give you a letter for your local pharmacist, which explains where they can obtain the cream from. Please take this letter to show your pharmacist when you hand in the prescription from your GP. As they are unlikely to hold it in stock, you should allow time for them to order it in for you.

The pharmacies at Guy's and St Thomas' are as follows:

- The Lloyds Pharmacy located in the Sainsbury's shop on Great Maze Pond, Guy's Hospital **t:** 020 7188 7611
- The Lloyds Pharmacy at St Thomas' Hospital **t:** 020 7188 7642

Contact us

If you have any further questions or concerns about depigmenting creams, please contact your doctor. Alternatively, you can contact our **Pharmacy Medicines Helpline** on **020 7188 8748** 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

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

Language and accessible 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

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

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