

# Aqueous cream: may cause skin irritation, particularly in children with eczema

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## Key messages

- Aqueous cream is used to relieve dry skin conditions such as eczema. It can be used as a moisturiser and as a wash-off soap-substitute.
- Using aqueous cream as a moisturiser may cause skin reactions such as burning, stinging, itching and redness in some people, particularly in children with eczema. These reactions are generally not serious.
- The reactions may be caused by an ingredient in aqueous cream called sodium lauryl sulfate or other ingredients such as preservatives.
- If you or your child gets skin irritation with aqueous cream, stop using it and talk to your doctor or a pharmacist. They will be able to advise you on alternative treatments.



**If you get skin irritation after using aqueous cream, stop using it and talk to your doctor or a pharmacist. They will be able to advise you on alternative treatments.**

## What is aqueous cream and what does it do?

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Aqueous cream is used as a moisturising treatment (emollient) and 'wash-off' soap substitute to relieve dry skin conditions, such as eczema, in adults and children.

Eczema is a dry-skin condition that comes in many different forms. It can affect people of all ages but is mainly seen in children. You cannot 'catch' eczema from another person.

In mild cases of eczema, the skin is dry, scaly, red and itchy. In more severe cases there may be weeping, crusting and bleeding.

Healthy skin provides a protective barrier against damage and infection, and contains fats and oils which help to retain moisture. If you have eczema, your skin may not contain as much fat and oil as healthy skin, and the protective barrier may not be as effective. This can be worse in a child's skin than in an adult's skin.

Keeping skin moisturised and soft is therefore key to managing the symptoms of eczema. Using a moisturising treatment, such as aqueous cream, can help to retain moisture in the skin and relieve eczema symptoms.

In the UK, aqueous cream is sold over-the-counter in supermarkets and retail pharmacies in small quantities, and may also be prescribed in larger quantities by a healthcare professional. Approximately 11 million containers of 100 mL aqueous cream were supplied by hospital and retail pharmacies in the UK in 2012<sup>1</sup>.

### **What is the new information for aqueous cream?**

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As with any medicinal product, there may be side effects with the use of aqueous cream. We recently reviewed all medical and scientific research on possible skin irritation with the use of aqueous cream in children.

The research showed that:

- aqueous cream may cause skin reactions such as burning, stinging, itching and redness in some people, particularly in children with eczema. These reactions are generally not serious.
- reactions often occur within 20 minutes, but may occur later.
- they may be caused by an ingredient in aqueous cream called sodium lauryl sulfate or other ingredients such as preservatives.

Despite the irritant effects reported, aqueous cream has been useful in the treatment of eczema in a very large number of patients.

### **What should I do if I notice a skin reaction when using aqueous cream on myself or my child?**

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- **Don't worry; skin reactions caused by aqueous cream are generally not serious. If you or your child gets skin irritation after using aqueous cream, stop using it and talk to your doctor or a pharmacist. They will be able to advise you on alternative treatments.**
- Ingredients which may cause local skin reactions such as burning, stinging, itching and redness are listed on the packaging of aqueous cream products with a warning.
- Please report any suspected side effects to a medicine or vaccine to the Yellow Card Scheme: <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard>

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<sup>1</sup> Data derived from IMS Health, IMS MIDAS, 01/12/2012, by the MHRA