

## **Emollients — advice for use**

Emollients can be divided into three categories:

1. Ointments — greasy, oil-based emollients that contain no preservatives so are less likely to cause irritation. They are ideal for night time usage and when the skin has flared.
2. Creams — lighter emollients that are easier to apply than ointments; they are good for daytime use but contain preservatives, which can cause irritation
3. Lotions — contain more water than oil so are very light and cooling; they contain preservatives (so can irritate) and need to be applied more frequently than other emollients, therefore larger quantities are often needed

### **Choosing an emollient**

#### **PATIENT CHOICE IS PARAMOUNT WHEN SELECTING AN EMOLLIENT FOR REGULAR USE**

Emollients are most effective if used regularly. Empowering patients to choose their own emollient is established good practice and helps to increase concordance.

- **For acute exacerbations — greasier emollients (ie, ointments) are more effective**
- **For maintenance treatment (between exacerbations) — lighter emollients (ie, creams and lotions) are often more tolerable.**

If a rash is weeping or exudating, use a cream or lotion. These are non occlusive and will allow evaporation to occur. An ointment will slip off the skin.

If a rash is dry and scaly, use an ointment. The occlusive base will help to retain moisture.

### **Tips when using emollients**

- Use a pump dispenser, or allocate an old spoon to scoop the emollient out of a tub — this helps to prevent contamination
- Frequent and liberal application of emollients is advised. The skin should glisten after application and not feel too greasy
- When using an emollient to wash, advise the patient as follows:
  - Pat skin dry after washing to avoid further damaging the skin
  - Apply emollients within 3 to 4 minutes of getting out of the bath or shower to “trap” moisture
  - Discourage frequent bathing; more than 15 minutes in the bath can lead to further dryness of the skin due to the body’s own natural moisturising factor leaching out into the water
  - A bath or shower will become slippery if patient use an emollient wash — advise patients to be cautious
- If using an emollient and a topical corticosteroid concomitantly, the emollient should be applied first with a gap of a few minutes before applying the corticosteroid
- Do not use an emollient for two hours before applying tacrolimus (Protopic®) ointment