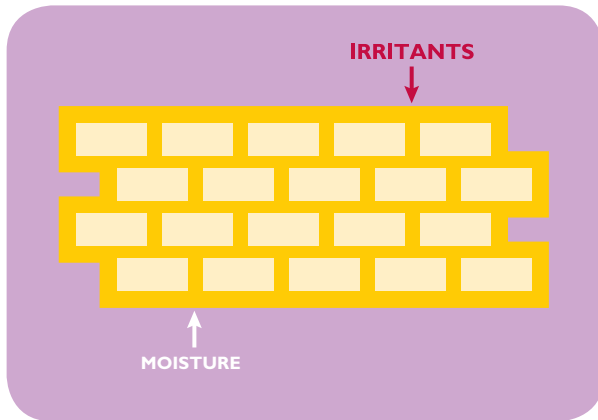


# MANAGING DRY SKIN CONDITIONS

*A guide for patients*

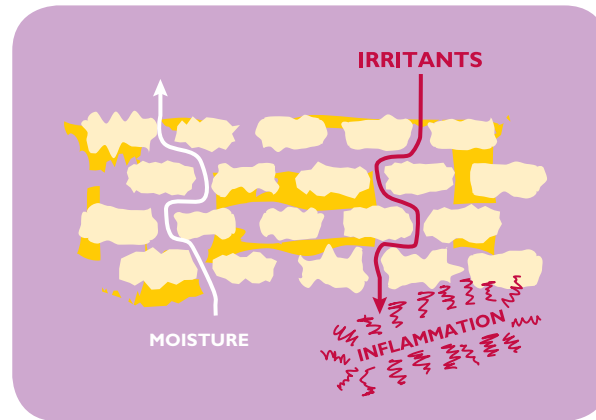


## Normal skin

Healthy skin provides a barrier between the body and the external environment.

In normal skin, natural oils fill spaces between plump skin cells to form a good skin barrier – keeping moisture in and irritants out.

Skin cells and the surrounding natural oils are often shown as a brick wall. The skin cells are the 'bricks' and the natural oils are the 'mortar'.

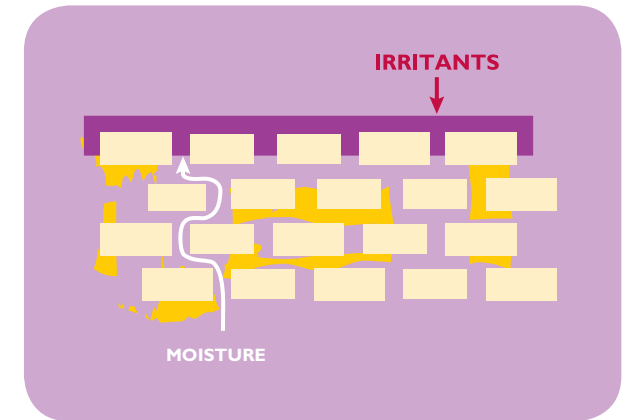


## Dry skin – An impaired skin barrier

An impaired skin barrier has a shortage of natural oils which allows moisture to escape from the skin too quickly. The skin cells shrink, opening cracks which allow greater moisture loss and the entry of irritants. The skin will become dry and may be itchy. Scratching damages the skin even more.

People with dry skin conditions, such as eczema or dermatitis, psoriasis and ichthyosis, have an impaired skin barrier. Certain factors can make dry skin conditions worse, such as air conditioning, central heating or sitting close to a fire and bathing or showering with soaps or detergents.

Dry skin can affect people of any ethnic origin and any age group from the very young to the elderly. Older people are prone to developing dry skin as the skin becomes thinner and less efficient at producing natural oils (sebum).



## Restoring the skin barrier using a moisturiser/emollient

Emollients rehydrate the skin by forming a layer of oil which traps moisture in the skin allowing cells to swell and close the cracks.

Some emollients also contain humectants, such as glycerol or urea, which keep water within the skin.

As dry skins are thirsty skins emollients should be applied regularly in large amounts to rehydrate and soften the skin, making it smooth, supple and less itchy and maintain the improvement in the skin.

Emollients are available as lotions, creams, ointments, gels, soap substitutes and bath emollients. Different types of emollients may be needed for specific areas of the body.

## HOW TO GET THE BEST RESULTS FROM YOUR MOISTURISERS/EMOLLIENTS

### DO'S AND DON'TS FOR APPLYING LEAVE-ON EMOLLIENTS



**USE EMOLLIENTS GENEROUSLY & REGULARLY**

- ✓ **DO** use moisturisers/emollients generously and regularly, to improve the condition of the skin and to help reduce itching. The more the better!
- ✗ **DON'T** scratch itchy skin if you can avoid it, as this causes further skin damage.
- ✓ **DO** try to find suitable emollients for your skin with your nurse's or doctor's help. This may be a combination of cream, ointment, lotion or gel emollients, depending on how dry your skin is and which you prefer to use.
- ✗ **DON'T** vigorously rub the emollients into your skin.
- ✓ **DO** smooth the emollient gently onto dry skin. Use gentle strokes in the same direction as hair growth (like stroking a cat or dog). This avoids blockage of the hair follicles.
- ✓ **DO** apply sufficient emollient so that the skin looks shiny. Allow time for any excess emollient to soak in, if necessary.
- ✓ **DO** apply emollients, immediately after a bath or shower, as this helps to trap moisture in the skin. Pat the skin dry before applying the emollient.
- ✓ **DO** remember that exposed areas such as the face, neck and hands may need more frequent treatment.

### DO'S AND DON'TS FOR USING EMOLLIENT SOAP SUBSTITUTES



**AVOID SOAP, DETERGENTS & BUBBLES**

- ✗ **DON'T** use soaps, bubble baths or foaming shower gels, which tend to dry and irritate the skin. If it bubbles or foams it dries the skin.
- ✓ **DO** use a soap substitute for washing; it does not need to lather and your skin will still be clean. **Bubbles are not needed to clean the skin.** NB Some cleansing products may contain added moisturisers in an attempt to limit the damaging effects of soap: it is better to avoid soap in the first place.
- ✗ **DON'T** wash with hot water, use tepid water to minimise removal of natural oils from the skin.
- ✓ **DO** use a special liquid bath emollient which is designed to disperse efficiently in the water, or use a specially designed shower emollient if you prefer to shower. (Make sure to place a non-slip mat in the bath or shower).
- ✗ **DON'T** vigorously towel the skin dry because this makes dry skin conditions worse.
- ✓ **DO** gently pat your skin with a soft towel after washing.

## HOW SHOULD YOU USE YOUR EMOLLIENTS?

Applied directly to skin



Used instead of soap



Used in the bath water



Used under the shower



Although all emollients rehydrate the skin, some are designed for specific uses as shown above. Therefore it is important that you always read the label on your emollient(s).

### NOTES ABOUT YOUR EMOLLIENTS

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**Always read the label on your emollients.**