

Occlusive dressings to treat chronic inflammatory skin lesions

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about occlusive dressings to treat skin lesions and provide you with a step-by-step guide on how to apply the dressings at home.

We recommend you also watch our online demonstration video called Occlusive dressings - www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/dermatologyvideos to help understand how to apply the dressings. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is an occlusive dressing?

Occlusive dressings is a term we use to describe the covering of an area of skin with an adhesive (sticky) dressing to enhance the effect of the treatment. We commonly use hydrocolloid dressings which are adhesive foam/film backed dressings that contain a gelling agent. They are usually waterproof, flexible and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some common brand names are Duoderm®, Nu-derm™ hydrocolloid, Tegaderm™ hydrocolloid, Activheal® hydrocolloid and Comfeel® Plus. They are most commonly used with a topical steroid on the skin under the dressing. Some occlusive dressings or tapes contain a steroid medication.

What are occlusive dressings used for?

They can be used for the treatment of selected small, stubborn, and thickened areas of skin in conditions like eczema, psoriasis, lichen simplex and nodular prurigo. Occlusive dressings will often be suggested as an additional treatment by your healthcare professional if the skin lesions have not responded adequately to topical steroid creams when used alone.

Where can they be applied?

Occlusive dressings can be applied anywhere on the body apart from the face, groin and parts of the body where skin is prone to rubbing (for example any skin folds). All dressings are single-use only so they should never be reused. The dressings can be obtained on prescription or purchased at a pharmacy or online.

What are the benefits of using occlusive dressings?

- Enhance the effect of topical steroid applied on the skin
- Allow softening of thickened skin
- Provide a protective barrier to prevent damage from scratching
- Contain wound healing properties.

What are the risks of using occlusive dressings?

When used correctly the risk of side effects are very low. Side effects that can occur are:

- Localised allergic reactions or sensitivity to ingredients in the dressing
- Increased absorption of topical steroids and therefore increased risk of side effects if used for prolonged periods of time or without regular review by a healthcare professional.
- Skin treatment site becomes over moist.

When should they not be used?

Occlusive dressings should not be used if the area of skin is infected as it could worsen the infection. Please seek advice from a health care professional if you suspect a skin infection is present.

They should not be used over topical calcineurin inhibitors (Tacrolimus (Protopic®) and Pimecrolimus (Elidel®) due to the risk of absorbing into the skin.

What do I need to prepare before applying occlusive dressings?

You will need the following equipment

- hydrocolloid dressing
- clean pair of scissors
- prescribed topical treatment (such as topical steroid).

For several hours prior, avoid applying any creams or ointments to the surrounding skin where the dressings are to be applied as this will make it difficult for the dressing to stick to the skin.

If the area is very hairy it may help to trim the hairs to help the dressing stick to the skin and to reduce any discomfort when removing.

How do I apply an occlusive dressing?

1. First wash and dry your hands.
2. Cut the dressing to size if required (allowing a 2-3cm border to the affected area).
3. If using the dressing in moveable joint areas (for example the elbows, knees and feet), it is helpful to cut slits in the corners of the dressing to make it easier to mould to the skin.
4. Apply the prescribed steroid ointment thinly to the area of skin to be treated.
5. Remove the paper backing from the dressing and centre the dressing over the area and smooth out towards the edges
6. Press the dressing gently onto the skin for approximately 1 minute to help it stay in place.

When should I change the dressing?

We advise changing the dressing after 24 -72 hours but please follow the directions from your healthcare professional. Always remove the dressing immediately if there is pain or increased itching or burning to the affected area.

How do I remove the occlusive dressing?

To remove the dressing support the surrounding skin with one hand and gently remove the dressing with the other hand. Remove the dressing downwards in the direction the hair lies. If the dressing is difficult to remove it may be advisable to use a medical adhesive removal spray or gently peel off the dressing following a soak in a bath or shower

On removing the dressing you might notice a slight odour (smell) and this is probably due to the odour of the dressing. If, however, there is a very unpleasant odour and the area of skin treated is very red, weepy or pus is present, do not reapply the dressing and ask your healthcare professional to check it.

How long can I continue to use occlusive dressings?

Using occlusive dressings with topical steroids underneath should be undertaken for a limited period of time to avoid side effects. Please follow the advice of your healthcare professional.

Useful sources of information

Watch our video about how to apply occlusive dressings:

www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/dermatologyvideos

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to the nurse or doctor looking after you. You can contact the dermatology department on 020 7188 7847. If it is urgent, call the hospital switchboard on 020 7188 7188 and ask for the on-call dermatologist.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** 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, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

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

This service 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 **w:** www.111.nhs.uk

NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w:** www.nhs.uk

Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets, or **e:** patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk

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