

## Tips for Managing Itch, Abnormal Skin Sensations (Dysaesthesia), & Pain

### What practical steps can I make to lessen itch?

Itching is often worse at night time, when you are hot or when you are stressed or anxious. Scratching can cause considerable damage that can lead to thickened skin, nodules and sometimes infection. There are some practical steps that can help. Firstly, cut your nails as short as you can. Cotton gloves worn in bed will limit damage from scratching in your sleep. Consider having a short cool bath before bed, with a bath emollient (see below) and having a cooler bedroom to sleep in eg windows open, a sheet rather than thick duvet and blankets. Relaxation techniques, meditation, behavioural therapy, yoga, acupuncture and mindfulness can all help.

### Simple measures to avoid dry skin

Dry skin can be the cause of itch or can exacerbate it. Shower gels, soaps, shampoo and other detergents can all dry out the skin. Using soap substitutes to wash with, eg Dermol 200 or doublebase wash, in place of soap and using moisturisers regularly will help. Moisturisers containing urea help to draw water into the skin and additional ingredients like lauromacrogols can have a soothing effect, eg Balneum Plus cream. For best soothing effect, store in the fridge and apply from cold. Menthol containing creams can also be very soothing, eg dermacool, again applied from cold.

If you are having a bath, consider adding a bath emollient, eg Dermol 600 or Epsom Salts or oatmeal (Aveeno). A humidifier can counteract winter house dryness when your heating is on.

### Tips for an itchy scalp

Scalp itch is common. There are medicated shampoos aimed at dry scalps and dandruff that will limit further dryness, eg Head and Shoulders or those with Urea eg Eucerin Dermocapillaire. Coal tar shampoos can also be soothing and decrease scaliness eg Polytar or Capasal. You can apply oils and leave these on overnight to soak in and hydrate the scalp. Simple olive oil or coconut ointment are both popular. Lastly, there are leave in lotions available over the counter that can be applied directly to the scalp eg Eucerin dermocapillaire scalp lotion and these can all be used in conjunction with prescribed medicated products recommended by your doctor, eg Ketoconazole shampoo or topical steroids.

### Further tips for localized itch and pain

If itching or pain is localised, eg to one arm, it is sometimes possible to desensitise the area using chili pepper based creams (Capsaicin). The creams cause a mild burning sensation and have to be applied four times daily to the area for several months. This has the effect of making the brain switch off sensations from the area of application and the frequency of applications can be gradually reduced, eg to three times daily for a month, then twice and so on.



Capsaicin cream application:

Months 1-3 Apply 4 times daily

Month 4 apply three times daily

Month 5 apply twice daily

Month 6 apply once daily

### **Dressings and bandages**

Bandages and dressings can be used to protect the skin from scratching and to be soothing and hydrating. Wet wraps are predominantly used in children but modified forms can be used in adults, particularly for limbs. Wet wraps involve having two tubular bandages cut to size for each limb. After applying moisturisers to the skin in a downward direction, one bandage is soaked in warm water. Excess water is squeezed out and then the bandage is applied to the limb, followed by the dry bandage. These are usually left on overnight. An alternative is zinc paste bandages applied to limbs.

[Wet wrap application](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNdHI5NdTsl) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNdHI5NdTsl>

[Paste application](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjW34sY8PTo) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjW34sY8PTo>

Tubifast bandages:

Green for small limbs

Blue for large limbs

Yellow for extra large limbs

If you have thickened nodules, you can apply any prescribed medicated treatment and then cover with an occlusive dressing, such as DuoDerm Extra thin, which can be cut to size. This can be left on overnight to prevent further damage at night time or can stay in place for several days.



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