

REFERENCE CHART

Emollients

Dr George Moncrieff, FRCP, FRCGP and past chair of the Dermatology Council for England, presents his personal recommendations for emollient choices

Key
 ● Highly recommended
 ◆ Recommended
 ■ Could be considered
 ▲ Not recommended
 ○ Avoid - do NOT use

NHS drug tariff information sourced from NHSBSA Dictionary of Medicines and Devices (dm+d) browser and correct at time of preparation in March 2026

Simple emollients (creams, lotions and gels)

Name	Price/500g	Delivery	Comments
● AproDerm emollient cream	£4.95	Pump	Licensed from birth. 100% recyclable container using 25% less plastic than many other pump dispensers. Nice pump and only 5% wastage left in container
● AproDerm gel	£3.99	Pump	Licensed from birth. 100% recyclable device using 25% less plastic than many other pump dispensers. Nice pump and only 5% wastage left in container
● AproDerm starter pack	£11.65	4 tubes	The only product of its kind. Enables patients to try the range of AproDerm products before choosing the one they like. Four prescription charges may apply
○ Aquamax cream	£3.99	Tub	Avoid as comes in a tub, which risks contamination
○ Aqueous cream	Variable	Tub	Avoid completely as contains 1% SLS, an irritant even to normal skin that damages the skin barrier, making eczema worse, and comes in a tub
■ Cetraben cream	£6.38	Pump	Nice pump (Reike) with minimal wastage and dispenses 5g per depression. Contains 4.5% glycerol as humectant. Costs slightly more than equivalents - offset by the use of a pump
■ Cetraben lotion	£5.92	Pump	Nice pump (Reike) with minimal wastage and dispenses 5g per depression. Contains 4.5% glycerol as humectant. Costs slightly more than equivalents - offset by the use of a pump
◆ Doublebase gel	£5.99	Pump	Efficient pump system with minimal wastage. Contains glycerol as humectant. Performs significantly better when tested objectively in head-to-head studies with cheaper alternatives that claim to mimic Doublebase gel
▲ Emollin aerosol spray	£16.38	Spray	Essentially 50:50 (white soft paraffin and liquid paraffin) in a spray - highly flammable. Only available in 240ml (£7.86) packs. Expensive
▲ Enopen	£6.06	Pump	Mimics Cetraben cream, but there are even cheaper copies
▲ Epaderm cream	£7.34	Pump	Contains chlorocresol, which some patients complain has a 'chemical' smell. Expensive
○ Epimax original cream	£2.74	Squeeze bottle	Avoid as could cause corneal ulceration due to alcohol preservatives
○ Epimax excetra cream	£3.18	Squeeze bottle	Mimics Cetraben cream but comes in a squeeze bottle with a high alcohol / preservative content and could cause corneal ulceration. White soft paraffin 13.2% and liquid paraffin 10.5% plus glycerol
○ Epimax isomol gel	£3.17	Squeeze bottle	Mimics Doublebase gel but performs differently and comes in a squeeze bottle with greater wastage. High alcohol / preservative content and could cause corneal ulceration
▲ Epimax intensive cream	£2.84	Squeeze bottle	Adequate only as an inexpensive soap substitute. 'Similar' to Diprobase cream (discontinued). White soft paraffin 20% and liquid paraffin 8%. Significant wastage and the bottle is not airtight so it needs a high alcohol content, which could sting and cause corneal ulceration
▲ ExmaQS cream	£2.95	Tub	Marginally different formulation of paraffins to Enopen, but cheaper. Comes in a tub, so not recommended
▲ Exmabase gel	£2.85	Pump	Weak pump system with high wastage
▲ Exmalatum cream	£4.45	Pump	Mimics Cetraben cream, but marginally different formulation of paraffins
■ ExoCream	£3.99	Pump	Essentially identical to E45 cream. Aptar pump has 12% wastage, but the bottle is overfilled to compensate. Bottle recyclable, but not the pump. A reasonable soap substitute
○ Lipobase cream	£14.60	Tube	Only available in 50g tubes (£1.46/50g). Expensive
◆ MyriBase cream	£4.79	Pump	Mimics Cetraben cream, but cheaper. Aptar pump has 12% wastage, but the bottle is overfilled to compensate. Bottle recyclable, but not the pump
▲ MyriBase gel	£4.66	Pump	Similar formulation to Doublebase gel but does not perform as well when tested objectively in head-to-head studies. Aptar pump has 12% wastage, but bottle is overfilled to compensate. Bottle recyclable, but not the pump
○ Soffen cream	£4.79	Tub	Mimics Cetraben cream. Comes in a tub so not recommended
○ Unguentum M cream	£8.48	Tub	Avoid as there are less expensive alternatives and comes in a tub
○ Ultrabase cream	£7.01	Tub	Avoid as comes in a tub and expensive
○ ZeroAQS cream	£3.39	Tub	Mimics Aqueous cream - but no SLS. Contains chlorocresol, which can smell 'chemical'. Avoid as comes in a tub
▲ Zerobase 11% cream	£5.66	Pump	Mimics Diprobase cream (discontinued). Contains chlorocresol which can smell 'chemical'
■ Zerocream	£4.36	Pump	Mimics E45 - a better alternative
▲ Zerodouble gel	£5.21	Pump	Mimics Doublebase gel, but different formulation and does not perform as well when tested objectively in head-to-head studies
▲ Zeroguent cream	£7.32	Pump	Mimics Unguentum M, but comes with a pump. Expensive

Simple emollients (ointments)

These all come in tubs, as they are too thick to be dispensed via a pump, so care must be taken to prevent contamination - see cautions

Name	Price/500g	Comments
● AproDerm	£3.95	Includes a pair of spatulas in lid to prevent contamination from fingers. 100% recyclable container
▲ Cetraben	£6.39	Comes in 125g (£3.68) & 450g (£5.75) tubs. Relatively expensive compared with equivalents
▲ Emelpin	£3.97	Contains emulsifying wax 30% & yellow soft paraffin (YSP) 10%
● EmulsifEss	£3.93	Contains 3% SLS, which is an irritant, even to normal skin
▲ Epaderm	£7.01	Identical constituents to Hydromol, but slightly softer and more expensive. Water miscible
▲ Epimax	£5.16	Paraffin-free ointment
▲ Fifty:50	£3.92	Price varies frequently, often a lot more expensive; avoid
◆ Hydromol	£5.60	Identical constituents to Epimax, but less expensive. Water miscible
◆ KreaMoint 50:50	£3.11	An inexpensive ointment option
▲ QV Intensive	£6.70	Available in 450g (£6.03) packs. Relatively expensive
▲ Thirty:30	£6.93	Relatively expensive
● Zeroderm	£4.35	Similar to Hydromol/Epaderm (white, not yellow, soft paraffin). Water miscible

Caution

- All these products contain paraffin and are therefore naturally flammable. Avoid naked flames
- Patients should be advised not to extract with fingers as this will rapidly contaminate ointment (ideally use a clean spoon or disposable spatula)

Sophisticated emollients

These usually prevent TEWL for longer periods, often 24 hours or more. That means they are not only more convenient, but also last longer and may be surprisingly cost effective

Name	Price/500g	Delivery	Significant ingredients	Comments
Urea-containing emollients				
5% urea is an effective humectant and is mildly antipruritic				
◆ Baileum Intensive cream	£9.97	Pump	5% urea & 0.1% ceramide	Prevents TEWL for up to 24 hours. Avoid if allergic to soya or peanuts
● Eucerin dry skin relief 5% cream	£38.53	Tube	5% urea	£5.78 per 75ml pack. Avoid as very expensive
▲ ImuDERM	£6.95	Pump	5% urea	Weak pump spring - refills slowly. (Not a substitute for Baileum as no ceramide)
10% urea, or stronger, is significantly keratolytic				
▲ Dermatronics dry skin balm	£12.45	Pump	10% urea	Relatively expensive
● Flexitol 10% urea cream	£12.54	Pump	10% urea	Uses highly efficient Reike pump. Market leader
● Flexitol 25% urea heel balm	£15.77	Pump	25% urea	Uses highly efficient Reike pump. Market leader
● Hydromol Intensive 10% cream	£23.75	Tube	10% urea	Comes in 100g tubes (£4.75/100g). Avoid as very expensive
Emollients with additional properties (eg natural moisturising factors, ceramides, colloidal oatmeal or povidone)				
● Adex gel	£5.99	Pump	Glycerol & 4% nicotinamide	Anti-itch, anti-inflammatory & barrier-enhancing properties. Minimal wastage. Superb emollient
● AproDerm colloidal oat cream	£5.80	Pump	Colloidal oatmeal. Paraffin-free emollient. Free from distearyldimonium chloride	Licensed from birth. 100% recyclable device using 25% less plastic than many other pump dispensers. Nice pump and only 5% emollient wastage left in container. Superb. Long TEWL
▲ Aveeno cream	£7.59	Pump	Colloidal oatmeal	Very nice emollient with evidence for anti-inflammatory properties (likely due to colloidal oatmeal), but not recommended as pump leaves over 25% wastage & classed as a cosmetic (must endorse prescription with 'ACBS'). Not licensed from birth
▲ Aveeno Daily moisturising lotion	£8.12	Pump	Colloidal oatmeal	Very nice emollient with evidence for anti-inflammatory properties (likely due to colloidal oatmeal). Classed as a cosmetic (must endorse prescription with 'ACBS'). Not licensed from birth. Comes in 200ml (£4.31), 300ml (£5.81) and 500ml (£8.12) packs
● CeraVe cream	£6.70	Tub, but a reusable pump can be bought OTC for £1.50	Three essential ceramides. High concentration glycerol plus hyaluronic acid. Paraffin free. Multivesicular technology	Highly effective multi-vesicular technology provides long TEWL. Hyaluronic acid is the most powerful humectant available. (NHS tariff scheduled April 26 - £6.08/454g)
● CeraVe SA smoothing cream	Not on NHS tariff yet	Tube	Three essential ceramides. 10% urea, 0.5% salicylic acid & 0.5% lipohydroxy acid. Hyaluronic acid	Highly effective multi-vesicular technology provides long TEWL. A really superb anti-keratotic emollient especially for keratosis pilaris. (£12/177ml)
◆ Doublebase Dayleve gel	£6.79	Pump	Povidone & high glycerol concentration	Povidone prevents TEWL for around 12 hours. Contains significantly higher concentration of glycerol than Doublebase gel formulations. Minimal wastage
● Doublebase Once gel	£6.99	Pump	Povidone. 15% glycerol, 15% isopropyl myristate & 15% liquid paraffin 'triple action'	Feels like a cream, but behaves more like an ointment. Full 24-hour TEWL effect, so cost efficient. Avoids usual preservatives. Fragrance free
● Epimax oatmeal cream	£3.19	Tube	Alcohol preservative	High alcohol content, which stings and could cause corneal ulceration
▲ Hydromol 2.5% cream	£12.88	Pump	SPC 2.5% - a natural moisturising factor	A superb emollient but expensive, so generally avoid
◆ Lipikar Baume AP+ Max	Not on NHS tariff	Pump	Glycerine (~8%) & niacinamide (~4%). Manufacturer's proprietary formulation also contains microresyl, a proteaseic polypeptide in the 'neurobioma', & Aqua Posae Filiformis	Not available on NHS. 400ml costs £25

Name	Price/500g	Delivery	Significant ingredients	Comments
◆ Miclaro oat cream	£3.99	Pump	Colloidal oatmeal	Essentially identical formulation to Aveeno cream, but not classed as a cosmetic. Aptar pump has 12% wastage, but bottle is overfilled to compensate. Bottle recyclable, but not the pump. Not licensed from birth
▲ Oilatum cream	£8.57	Pump	Povidone & glycerol	No longer recommended as now more expensive. Povidone prevents TEWL for around 12 hours.
▲ QV cream	£6.75	Pump	Glycerol 15%	Long TEWL. Overfilled to compensate for minimal wastage with pump. Non-sting formulation as no cetylalcohol. Suitable under one year of age as no phenoxethanol. Relatively expensive
▲ Zeroveen cream	£6.13	Pump	Free from dimethicone, but no glycerol humectant	Nice pump (Reike) with minimal wastage & 5g dispensed per depression. There are better, less expensive alternatives

Local prescribing guidance should be respected, but this table may be used to develop an informed local formulary

SLS Sodium lauryl sulfate. Damaging to skin barrier. **Humectant** Substance that helps retain moisture in the skin barrier. **SPC** Sodium pyrrolidone carboxylate, the highest concentration natural humectant in the skin. **TEWL** Transepidermal water loss

Anti-itch emollients

Name	Price/500g	Delivery	Significant ingredients	Comments
● Adex gel	£5.99	Pump	Glycerol & 4% nicotinamide	Anti-itch, anti-inflammatory and barrier-enhancing properties. Minimal wastage
▲ AquaSoothe cream	£15.62	Tub	1% or 2% menthol	Avoid as comes in a tub
● Balneum Intensiv cream	£9.97	Pump	5% urea & 0.1% ceramide	Prevents TEWL for up to 24 hours. Avoid if allergic to soya or peanuts
◆ Balneum Plus cream	£14.99	Pump	5% urea + lauromacrogols*	Nice pump (Reike) with minimal wastage & 5g dispensed per depression
● Dermacool cream	Various	Tub, tubes & pump	0.5% menthol in aqueous cream (£18.05/500g) 1% menthol (£18.64) 2% menthol (£19.07) 5% menthol (£19.83)	Uses SLS-free aqueous cream. Uses excellent Reike pump, but very expensive (5% menthol available OTC in 500g pack but costs around £30)
▲ E45 itch relief cream	£18.38	Pump	5% urea + lauromacrogols*	Nice pump (Reike) with minimal wastage and 5g dispensed per depression. Identical formulation to Balneum Plus, but more expensive
▲ Methoderm cream	Various	Pump	0.5% menthol in aqueous cream (£16.94/500g) 1% menthol (£17.50) 2% menthol (£17.91) 5% menthol (£18.45)	Uses SLS-free aqueous cream. Similar to Dermacool, but has more preservatives
▲ Ultraveen itch relief cream	£11.85	Pump	5% urea & 3% colloidal oatmeal	There are less expensive equivalents

*Lauromacrogols are a locally anaesthetic agent

Antiseptic treatments

Name	Price/500g	Delivery	Significant ingredients	Comments
● CeraDerm lotion	£5.22	Pump	Chlorhexidine dihydrochloride 0.1% & benzalkonium 0.1%	Essentially identical to Dermol, but cheaper. Rare cases of anaphylaxis to chlorhexidine Suitable from birth. NHS licensed as a cosmetic. Leave-on, or soap substitute
■ Dermol cream	£7.19	Pump	Chlorhexidine dihydrochloride 0.1% & benzalkonium 0.1%	Rare cases of anaphylaxis to chlorhexidine. Leave-on, or soap substitute
■ Dermol 500 lotion	£6.52	Pump	Chlorhexidine dihydrochloride 0.1% & benzalkonium 0.1%	Rare cases of anaphylaxis to chlorhexidine. Leave-on, or soap substitute
▲ Eczmol 1% cream	£7.40	Pump	Chlorhexidine gluconate 1%	Less effective chlorhexidine salt than dihydrochloride Rare cases of anaphylaxis to chlorhexidine. Comes in 250ml (£3.70) packs
● Clinisept + spray	Not on NHS tariff (£14.95 for 100ml – Amazon price)	Aqueous spray (liquid)	1% stabilised hypochlorous acid in aqueous spray	Non-toxic to mammalian cells. Remarkably potent and broad spectrum antimicrobial (bacteria, viruses, yeasts, fungi and even spores). Preserves normal acid mantle. Non-sensitising and anti-inflammatory. Minimal impact on normal microbiome. Good for acne. Likely to be available as a 'medical device' on FP10 prescription from spring 2026

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