**What is Capsaicin cream?**

Capsaicin occurs naturally in plants. It is not known exactly how it works but it probably works by altering the pain messages sent to the brain to relieve pain.

Also, the massaging action on your skin when you apply the cream can send helpful messages to the brain to help relieve pain.

Capsaicin cream can be used for different types of pain. It can be used with standard painkillers for osteoarthritis of the knee or hand.

Capsaicin can also be used to relieve the pain from nerves close to the surface of the skin. This type of pain can happen after having shingles. It is called post-herpetic neuralgia. This type of pain is known as neuropathic (nerve) pain. This means injury or damage to nerves. It is described as burning, stabbing, stinging, shooting, aching or electric shock-like. Often it is not helped by simple painkillers like paracetamol.

**How long will I have to use Capsaicin cream for?**

This varies for different people. In general, you would use it for as long as you are requiring pain relief for nerve type pain if you are using it for post-herpetic neuralgia.

For pain from osteoarthritis it is usually used for 2 to 8 weeks.

**Side Effects**

Like all medicines capsaicin can cause some side effects, but not everyone will get them.

Capsaicin cream can cause a brief burning feeling when it is applied.

This is more likely if:
- You have applied too much cream
- The cream is applied just before or after a hot bath or shower.
- You are applying it less than 3 or 4 times a day.

When capsaicin cream is applied, occasionally the vapour can cause brief irritation to the eyes, nose or throat. It may cause watery eyes, runny nose, coughing, sneezing. These symptoms are usually mild and go away. Occasionally breathing in the vapour can cause breathlessness, or worsen asthma.

If any of these side effects become serious or you notice a side effect not mentioned here, or listed in the patient information sheet, contact your doctor.

While we have detailed the most common side effects in this leaflet, a full list is provided in the patient information sheet with the prescription.

**How to use Capsaicin cream**

Apply a pea sized amount of cream to the painful area three or four times a day and gently rub the cream in until there is none left on the surface of your skin.

Wash your hands carefully straight after applying the cream. If the hands are the area you are treating then wash your hands 30 minutes after applying the cream.

The cream should be applied at times evenly spaced out during the day and there should be a gap of at least 4 hours between applications.

Avoid applying just before or after a hot shower or bath as this may increase the burning sensation.

Avoid contact with eyes, mucous membranes and broken skin.

Avoid inhaling the vapour of the cream.
Capsaicin cream may need to be used for 1-2 weeks before nerve pain is relieved. You may feel a difference within the first week if you are using the capsaicin cream for pain from osteoarthritis.

Capsaicin is available as a strength of 0.025% for pain from osteoarthritis and is known as Zacin®. It is available as a strength of 0.075% for post-herpetic neuralgia and is known as Axsain®.

**Medication in chronic pain**

The benefits gained from using medication should always be more than any side–effects you may have. Only you know how bad your pain is, are able to say if your medicine is helping or is giving you problems with side effects. If your medicine is not helping you may not need to use it, but please talk to your doctor or pharmacist first.

Getting the best effect from your medication may be a matter of trial and error. It may help to keep a diary of your pain and other symptoms.

You can discuss your pain medication with your GP, pharmacist or pain specialist. They can give you advice on which painkillers may help with your pain. They can advise you on putting your dose up safely if your pain is worse and on taking less medication safely when your pain is less. You will find more information about your treatment in the product information leaflet.  

*If you understand how your treatment works you will be able to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects.*