

## Understanding NICE guidance

---

Information for people who use NHS services

# Alitretinoin for severe chronic hand eczema

*NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.*

This leaflet is about when **alitretinoin** should be used to treat people with severe chronic hand eczema in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with severe chronic hand eczema but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe severe chronic hand eczema or the treatments in detail – a member of your healthcare team should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on the back page.

*This may not be the only possible treatment for severe chronic hand eczema. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.*

## What has NICE said?

Alitretinoin is recommended as a possible treatment for people with severe chronic hand eczema if:

- their eczema has not improved with treatments called potent topical corticosteroids **and**
- standard assessments show that their eczema is severe and is affecting their quality of life.

Alitretinoin treatment should be stopped:

- as soon as the eczema has clearly improved **or**
- if the eczema remains severe after 12 weeks **or**
- if the eczema has not clearly improved after 24 weeks.

Treatment with alitretinoin should be started and monitored only by doctors who:

- are skin specialists (dermatologists) **or**
- have experience in both treating people with severe chronic hand eczema and using drugs like alitretinoin.

When assessing how a person's eczema affects their quality of life, healthcare professionals should take into account any disabilities or difficulties in communicating which might mean that the standard assessments do not provide accurate information.

## Severe chronic hand eczema

Eczema is a condition that causes the skin to become dry, itchy, red and sore. Although some people are only mildly affected, severe hand eczema can cause the skin to become inflamed and broken. This can be very painful and may affect a person's ability to carry out their daily activities. A chronic condition is one that persists over a long period of time.

## Alitretinoin

Alitretinoin is used to treat adults with severe chronic hand eczema that has not improved after treatment with potent topical corticosteroids (a strong type of steroid applied to the skin as a cream or ointment). Alitretinoin has been shown to reduce skin inflammation. It is taken orally as a capsule once daily for between 12 and 24 weeks.

### What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued. So, if you have severe chronic hand eczema that has not improved after treatment with potent topical corticosteroids, standard assessments show that your eczema is severe and is affecting your quality of life, and your doctor thinks that alitretinoin is the right treatment for you, you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see [www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance) if the treatment is not available.

## More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with hand eczema. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- National Eczema Society, 0800 089 1122  
[www.eczema.org](http://www.eczema.org)
- Skin Care Campaign  
[www.skincarecampaign.org](http://www.skincarecampaign.org)

NHS Choices ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) may be a good place to find out more. Your local patient advice and liaison service (usually known as 'PALS') may also be able to give you more information and support. If you live in Wales you should speak to NHS Direct Wales for information on who to contact.

## About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts, including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider the evidence on the condition and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

*To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see [www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance)*

*This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at [www.nice.org.uk/TA177](http://www.nice.org.uk/TA177)*

*You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email [publications@nice.org.uk](mailto:publications@nice.org.uk) and quote reference N1982). The NICE website has a screen reader service called Browsealoud, which allows you to listen to our guidance. Click on the Browsealoud logo on the NICE website to use this service.*

*We encourage NHS and voluntary organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about hand eczema.*