

USEFUL PRODUCTS

Physical Protection

- Wear rubber gloves and/or barrier cream when washing up
- Avoid powerful soaps and detergents

Moisturising

- Diprobase ®
- E45 ®
- Aqueous cream
- Vaseline/liquid paraffin 50/50 (you can get this from a pharmacy)
- Neutrogena hand cream ®
- Unguentum M ®
- Doublebase ®
- Aveeno ®
- Eucerin®
- Double Base Emollient Shower Gel ®

Bathing and washing

- Emulsifying Ointment (very cheap!)
- Balneum ®
- Oilatum ®
- Bath E45 ®
- Hydromol Emolient ®
- Aveeno ®

Itching

- Balneum Plus Cream ®
- Xepin ® (avoid using over large areas of skin)
- Antihistamines eg Atarax ®, Neo Clarityn ® (Non Drowsy)
- PUVA therapy (via hospital dermatology department)
- E45 Itch Relief Cream ®
- Doublebase ®
- Lanacane ®

You can get more information about Scleroderma from:

The Scleroderma Society
PO Box 581, Chichester, PO19 9EW Tel: 020 7000 1925

Published by The Scleroderma Society © 2009
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**Scleroderma
Society**

Supporting people with Scleroderma for over 25 years

The Skin in Scleroderma

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The production costs of this leaflet have been supported by
Actelion Pharmaceuticals UK Ltd and Pfizer Ltd

INTRODUCTION

All patients with scleroderma will develop some skin changes. However, the severity and the problems created by the changes will vary greatly between patients. Problems include:

- tightening of the skin around the fingers, the face and other areas of the body causing contractures (fixed joints)
- ulceration
- dryness and irritation
- broken blood vessels (telangiectasia)
- calcinosis

In this leaflet we aim to tell you what can be done to tackle each of the above.

SKIN TIGHTENING

Tightening of the skin is a fundamental problem in scleroderma. There are several medicines, which may be of benefit for this problem, and these would normally be prescribed under the supervision of a hospital-based specialist. New medicines are constantly being developed, which one day may provide a safe and effective cure for this disease.

In addition to drug treatments, physiotherapy and exercises are important to maintain skin movements around joints. Warm paraffin wax baths can also be useful to relieve tight, painful hands and to enable easier exercising. Soaking in warm water with six drops of marjoram aromatherapy oil may help to soothe and relax painful hands and feet.

ULCERATION

It is not uncommon for patients with scleroderma to develop an ulcer. These are commonest on the fingers and toes. Ulcers may also occur on the legs, often following trauma such as a knock with a shopping trolley. It goes without saying that one should take care to avoid such knocks, but accidents do happen! However, wearing trousers rather than a skirt, or a thicker pair of tights or socks

may be enough to prevent the skin from being broken.

If a leg ulcer does develop it can take longer to heal in a patient with scleroderma because the skin is not as healthy. Ulcers should be dressed regularly; the frequency with which the dressings are changed will vary from patient to patient. Sometimes an ulcer requires daily dressing but often two to three times per week is sufficient. Dressings help in several ways they alleviate pain, contain any discharge, and prevent dirt and infection from entering the wound. It is also believed that there is an optimum moisture level to help with healing. An ulcer should be neither completely dry, nor too wet and sloughy. There are many different dressings available to try and provide the correct moisture level at the wound bed. Again the choice of dressing will be dictated by the type of ulcer.

For ulcers on the fingers and toes a dry dressing is often all that is needed. Healing may be promoted by helping the blood to circulate freely using drugs such as vasodilators which can be given in oral forms e.g. nifedipine or intravenously eg. Iloprost®. The intravenous form is only available from certain specialist rheumatology units, but can have good effects on difficult ulcers on the fingers and toes.

Ulcers may sometimes become infected and will require a course of oral antibiotics such as flucloxacillin. Signs that an ulcer has become infected are increasing pain, redness, discharge and smell. By eliminating infection one may be able to speed up healing. Ulcers can also develop eczema (inflamed skin) around them which may require a short course of steroid cream

DRYNESS, ECZEMA AND IRRITATION

Many people, not just people with scleroderma, suffer from dry and irritable skin. In general terms dry skin is not healthy

skin. Regular daily use of moisturisers can solve this problem. Moisturisers are either creams or ointments. Creams are based on water which means they are pleasant to use and soak into the skin well. However, they are not usually as effective as ointments which form an occlusive barrier on the skin and help to trap in your skin's natural moisture. Ointments are greasy and not as nice to use as creams. "Greasy" creams such as Diprobase® offer the best of both worlds and are to be recommended. Whilst there are many cosmetic moisturisers on the market many containing extra additives, these are often very expensive and there is little evidence they confer any special benefit. Products containing more than 10% urea can be effective.

Bath emollients can be very helpful in keeping the skin moist, but beware as they can make the bath slippery. It is good practice to apply your chosen moisturiser once you have dried yourself after a bath.

Itchiness is another common problem for some people with scleroderma. If regular moisturising, as outlined above, does not help then other measures can be tried. Several creams are available with specific ingredients aimed to combat itch. One is called Balneum Plus Cream® another is called Xepin Cream®. In addition antihistamine tablets may be tried. Some antihistamines can cause drowsiness and one needs to avoid driving etc. after they have been taken. However, it tends to be the antihistamines that cause mild sedation such as Atarax® which are the best at helping with itching, especially at night. During the day a non-sedating antihistamine such as Clarytin® could be tried. People often need to find which antihistamine suits them by trying several different ones. One further treatment, which can be used, is ultraviolet light therapy. This is only available in hospital dermatology units. Self-treatment with home ultraviolet lamps is not

advisable as the overall dose would not be monitored and one could cause lasting damage to the skin. An eight-week course of therapy can sometimes help with itching, although benefits may only be temporary.

TELANGIECTASIA

These burst blood vessels visible as small red spots, may develop on the face and hands. Understandably, many patients are keen for treatment. Happily, there is now an effective treatment for telangiectasia in the form of pulsed dye laser. This new technology utilises short bursts of high energy light to obliterate the broken blood vessels. This treatment will cause some stinging sensation on the skin and afterwards will leave some bruising for 7 to 10 days afterwards. It may take three to four treatments to work fully. This form of treatment is generally available from hospital dermatology departments.

An alternative is to use cosmetics to cover the telangiectasia and hospital Red Cross volunteers can offer tremendous help with this.

CALCIUM DEPOSITS

If calcium deposits occur at a site, which causes you no discomfort, then it is quite safe to leave them alone. However, if they are unsightly, cause discomfort or ulcerate and become infected then they can be removed by simple surgical techniques. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the deposits will not reappear. Occasionally these calcium deposits can discharge from the skin spontaneously. Paraffin wax baths will encourage this.

In summary skin problems are common in scleroderma but there are simple practical solutions to many of them.