

# Capsaicin

## What is capsaicin and why is this medication prescribed?

- Capsaicin is the ingredient in chili peppers that makes them hot.
- Capsaicin is also used topically to help relieve pain, particularly nerve pain. Capsaicin helps reduce the amount of a pain-related chemical in the body called substance P to interrupt pain signalling communication between the nerves in the spinal cord and other parts of the body.

## How should this medication be used?

- Capsaicin is available in a variety of topical products such as creams, ointments, gels, lotions, and patches.
  - Most topical creams/ointments come in concentrations of 0.025% or 0.075% and are applied sparingly three or four times a day to the affected area. All capsaicin creams/ointments should be rubbed into the skin until no product is visible on the skin.
  - Capsaicin is available in low concentrations over the counter as a patch (e.g., Solonpas®) in Canada. The 8% capsaicin patch available in Europe requiring medical supervision for application is **NOT** available in Canada.
- **Wear gloves when applying capsaicin!**
  - If gloves are not worn and hands are not part of the affected pain area, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after application. If hands are part of the affected pain area being treated, wait at least 30 minutes before washing.
  - Do **NOT** wrap the area where capsaicin was applied with dressing bandages.
  - Do **NOT** apply capsaicin to wounded, irritated, or broken skin.
  - Do **NOT** apply capsaicin near the eyes, mouth, or nose.
  - Avoid applying other topical products (including cosmetic and skin care products) to areas treated with capsaicin.
- If using a low-concentration capsaicin patch, clean and dry the affected area before removing the protective liner and applying the patch. Do **NOT** use a capsaicin patch within 1 hour of a hot bath/shower or while using a heating pad.

## When does this medication start to work?

Initial discomfort and a temporary stinging/ burning sensation is common after applying a topical capsaicin product. With repeated use, discomfort and sensation is reduced. It will take a minimum of 4-6 weeks of using topical capsaicin in doses of 0.025% – 0.075% three to four times/day before the effectiveness can be determined.

## What should I do if I forget a dose?

- Apply the missed dose as soon as you remember it unless it is almost time for the next dose. In this case, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule.
- Do **NOT** double dose to make up for a missed dose.

## What are the possible side effects of this medication?

Aside from the temporary burning/stinging sensation where capsaicin is applied, the topical capsaicin products available in Canada are safe to use. Remember, your health care team recommended this medication because the benefit to you is considered greater than the risk of side effects.

## How should this medication be stored?

- Store this medication in the container it came in and out of reach of children.
- Store at room temperature, away from excess heat/moisture (not in kitchen or bathroom).
- If at any point in the future capsaicin is stopped or expired, please return any remaining supply to your community pharmacy for proper medication disposal.