

**Patient
Information**

Dithranol (Dithrocream®) treatment for alopecia areata

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about dithranol cream and its use, including side effects for the treatment of alopecia areata (patchy hair loss).

What is dithranol treatment?

Dithranol is a licensed cream, made from tree bark, originally used to treat the skin condition psoriasis. The compound within Dithranol has found to be useful in the treatment of alopecia areata.

How does dithranol work in treating alopecia areata?

When dithranol cream is applied to the skin on the scalp it causes irritation, such as redness and itching. The irritation distracts the immune system away from attacking the hair roots which has caused your hair loss.

Who can be given dithranol treatment?

People are considered eligible for dithranol treatment if they have scalp alopecia areata. Dithranol is a safe option for children and can also be used during pregnancy.

What will I be prescribed?

You will be prescribed two strengths of dithranol:

- 0.5% Dithrocream®, in a purple 50g tube
- 1% Dithrocream®, in a brown 50g tube.

Reference No.

GHP11604_09_20

Department

Dermatology

Review due

September 2023

Patient Information

How to use the Dithrocream®

The aim is to produce skin irritation (such as redness and itching) on your scalp for about 24 hours. If there is no skin irritation the treatment is unlikely to be successful. It is difficult to predict how each person will respond to this treatment and how much irritation they will have. We do not want the irritation to be too uncomfortable, for this reason it is best to start slowly and gradually build-up the treatment over time. This is explained below:

1. Start by applying a thin coating of the lower strength dithranol (0.5% Dithrocream®) (purple tube) to any bald areas on the scalp and leave for 20 minutes. It is best to do this in the evening.
2. Do not cover the scalp with a hat or wig etc. during treatment.
3. Wash the cream off after 20 minutes. 4. Repeat this process daily.

Remember: You are aiming for 24 hours of itching and redness.

After 2 weeks the treatment will need adjusting to continue the correct amount of redness and itching. This is done by leaving the cream on your scalp longer, and then, if necessary, increasing the strength of the cream being used.

Please follow the steps below to reach the correct treatment level. You should only adjust the treatment every 2 weeks.

- Firstly, increase the length of time that the cream is on your scalp from 20 minutes to 40 minutes; the maximum time the cream can be left on your scalp is 60 minutes.
- Next (if needed) increase the strength of Dithrocream® to 1% (brown tube) and start again by applying the cream for 20 mins per day for 2 weeks. As your skin gets 'used to' the treatment you may need to adjust the length of time the cream is on your scalp to 40 minutes and if needed again to the maximum of 60 minutes.

The aim is to keep the skin feeling red and itchy for 24 hours.

When you are at the correct level of redness and itch you should continue at the same level (i.e. you do not need to keep increasing the treatment level or time duration after this point).

**Patient
Information****How long should I use the Dithrocream®?**

It can take several weeks before new hair growth is seen – so please don't give up too soon. If hair re-growth occurs it is important to continue the treatment until an acceptable growth is achieved.

If no new hair growth has occurred after 6 months, the treatment is usually stopped.

Does Dithrocream® work?

Many treatments for alopecia areata have a relatively low success rate but dithranol does have some success in stimulating hair growth in some people.

Reports suggest about a 1 in every 4 people who try the treatment will have acceptable hair re-growth. The re-growth rate is likely to be higher in those people with less hair loss.

What are the side effects of dithranol treatment?

Dithranol stains the skin and can dye light-coloured hair a purple/brown colour. If you wear a wig or hat regularly, you should be able to hide this effect. The staining is not permanent and will gradually fade within a couple of weeks.

Dithranol may also stain clothing and bathroom furniture. Be careful to wash your sink/shower/bath after each use to prevent staining.

Dithranol is an irritant and will irritate any skin it comes into contact with. The treatment should only be used on the scalp. Wash your hands after each application and avoid contact with your eyes.

You should also avoid excessive sunlight exposure to the scalp during a course of dithranol treatment, as you are at greater risk of sunburn to the areas that are being treated.

For further information please read the medicines information leaflet enclosed with the Dithrocream®.

**Patient
Information**

Acknowledgement

With special thanks to Dr Matthew Harries PhD FRCP, Consultant Dermatologist & Honorary Senior Lecturer, The Dermatology Centre, The University of Manchester.

Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust whose contribution to this patient information on dithranol has been invaluable.

Contact Information

If you experience any side effects or have any other questions please contact:

Dr Takwale's Secretary

Tel: 0300 422 5396

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 3:00pm

Content reviewed: September 2020