AZELAIC ACID

WHAT IS AZELAIC ACID?

It is a naturally occurring compound with antibacterial, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. It belongs to a group of medicines known as dicarboxylic acids and can be found in grains. Azelaic acid displays bacteriostatic and bactericidal properties against a variety of aerobic and anaerobic micro-organisms present on acne-bearing skin. Azelaic acid was identified as a molecule that accumulated at elevated levels in some parts of plants and was shown to be able to enhance the resistance of plants to infections.

HOW DOES AZELAIC ACID WORK?

Azelaic acid reduces inflammatory lesions and works to stop the growth of Propionibacterium acnes (the bacteria associated with the formation of acne). Azelaic acid is recommended as a useful second line or adjunctive treatment has been shown to be a good option for patients with mild-to-moderate acne, associated with moderate-to-severe post inflammatory hyperpigmentation, as it has been shown to reduce both the acne and the post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation. It is anti-inflammatory and antibacterial and works actively against comedones and may be better tolerated than tretinoin.

HOW SHOULD IT BE USED?

It should be applied to the entire affected area, usually in the morning and evening.

- Cleanse your face thoroughly of all make-up but don’t scrub with a washcloth or use exfoliating face washes as these can irritate your skin and worsen acne. Ideally use a mild facial cleanser like Cetaphil Cleansing Lotion or an oil cleanser like DHC Deep Cleansing Oil, to remove make-up gently.
- Pat skin dry (don’t rub) and allow skin to dry completely (20-30 minutes)
• Apply your Azalaic Acid gel in a thin layer (half a finger-tip unit) to your entire face (avoiding eyes, lips and nostrils) and allow to absorb completely which usually takes 15-20 minutes.
• Once the Azeliaic Acid gel is completely absorbed by your skin, apply a thin layer (half a finger-tip unit) of non-pore clogging moisturiser like Cetaphil moisturising lotion to your entire face.
• In the morning, gently wash your face, pat dry and re-apply Azelaic Acid gel in a thin layer (half a finger-tip unit) to your entire face (avoiding eyes, lips and nostrils) and allow to absorb completely which usually takes 15-20 minutes.
• Once the Azelaic Acid gel is completely absorbed by your skin, apply a light-weight moisturiser with SPF such as Cetaphil Dermacontrol SPF 30 moisturiser.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE-EFFECTS OF USING AZELAIC ACID?

All medications have some side effects, so it is important to be aware, however do not be alarmed. The most common side effect is skin irritation, burning, itching. Other side effects include urticaria, erythema (redness) and dryness but these can usually be reduced by using lower concentrations. Not everyone gets these side effects.
• You can minimise side effects by using the product only at night until your skin starts to get used to it, which could take a few weeks. Remember – only use a thin layer of the treatment at night (more is not better!)
• If the dryness, burning and redness are so bad you just can’t take it, try applying your moisturiser first, waiting 20 minutes for it to absorb, and then applying your topical treatment over the top.
• If your skin is extremely irritated after the first few days of treatment, take a few days off and don’t use any medicated treatments on your skin until it settles down. Then, when you are start using it again, apply the treatment as above but wash it off after 60 minutes. Slowly build up the amount of time you have the treatment on your skin until you can keep it on overnight.
• It is important to remember that these side effects are worst during the beginning few weeks of treatment and that they are entirely normal.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM ALLERGIC TO THE AZELAIC ACID?

It is important to understand that skin irritation and a true allergy to a topical treatment are very different. The treatment can cause some level of skin irritation – redness, flaking, peeling, skin tightness, burning and itching. That is part of how they work. Developing a true allergy to other ingredients in the preparation is rare. Symptoms of true allergy to a topical treatment are throat tightness, difficulty breathing, feeling faint and/or swelling of the eyes, face, lips or tongue on the first or second use of the treatment. This reaction can occur within minutes or up to 24 hours after product use. Remember that this type of serious allergic reaction is very different from the local skin irritation that you get at the site of treatment application, such as redness, dryness,
peeling and burning. If you think you have developed symptoms of a true allergy, please go to your local A&E department straight away.

HOW QUICKLY WILL MY TREATMENT WORK?

Results vary from person to person. You may notice an improvement in your skin after two to four weeks, but it can take up to four months of regular use of the treatment before you notice the effects. Be patient!

Acne: In general, a distinct improvement becomes apparent after 4 weeks. To obtain optimum results, Azelaic Acid gel can be used over several months in accordance with the clinical outcome. In case of no improvement after 1 month or exacerbation of acne, Azelaic Acid Gel should be discontinued, and other therapeutic options should be considered.

Rosacea: In general, a distinct improvement becomes apparent after 4 weeks of treatment. To obtain optimum results, Azelaic Gel can be used over several months in accordance with the clinical outcome. In case of no improvement after 2 month or exacerbation of rosacea, Azelaic Gel should be discontinued, and other therapeutic options should be considered.

WHAT IF I FORGET TO USE MY TREATMENT?

It is essential you try to integrate the treatment into your daily routine or as advised by your clinician. However, if you miss a few days, just start the following day with the same amount you always use on each of the affected areas and you will be back on track.