

Information about changes to medicines or treatments on the NHS: [Changes to rubefacients prescribing](#)

The NHS will be asking doctors to stop or greatly reduce the prescribing of some medicines from December 2017. This is because the medicines are:

- Not as safe as other medicines OR
- Not as good (effective) as other medicines OR
- More expensive than other medicines that do the same thing.

This includes rubefacients.

This document will explain why the changes are happening and where you can get more information and support.

[What are rubefacients?](#)

Rubefacients are preparations that produce a warm, reddening effect on your skin when you rub them in, due to increased blood flow. They are said to relieve aches and pains in joints and muscles.

Examples include Deep Heat®, Movelat® and Ralgex®.

[Why does the NHS want to reduce prescribing of rubefacients?](#)

There is not much evidence that rubefacients work.

The British National Formulary says that the evidence does not support the use of rubefacients in short- or long-term muscle pain.

In addition, The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) states that rubefacients should not be offered to treat osteoarthritis (“wear-and-tear” of the joints).

[What can I do if I still want to use a rubefacient?](#)

Rubefacients can be bought over-the-counter from a pharmacy (chemist) or supermarket. Ideally, ask for advice from a pharmacist.

Does this include products such as ibuprofen gel?

No; gels and creams containing ibuprofen or other ingredients such as diclofenac and piroxicam are called “topical NSAIDs” (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) rather than rubefacients.

Topical NSAIDs may be appropriate for some people and can be prescribed on the NHS or you can buy these over-the-counter too, but ask a pharmacist for advice as they are not suitable for everyone.

Where can I find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, GP or the person who prescribed the medication to you
- The NICE information for patients can be found at:
www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg177/ifp/chapter/About-this-information
- The Patients Association can also offer support and advice:
www.patients-association.org.uk/ or call 020 8423 8999

Find out more about the medicines that are being stopped or reduced:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/medicines/items-which-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed/>

If you have any questions about rubefacients prescribing please email them to: england.medicines@nhs.net