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2. Capsaicin

Capsaicin

Pronunciation: *kap-SAY-sin*

Generic name: capsaicin topical

Brand names: [Aspercreme Warming Pain Relief Patch](#), [Capzasin Back and Body](#), [Capzasin-HP](#), [Capzasin-P](#), [Castiva Warming](#), ... [show all 35 brands](#)

Dosage form: topical cream (0.025%; 0.033%; 0.035%; 0.075%; 0.1%; 0.25%), topical film (0.025%), topical liquid (0.025%), topical lotion (0.025%; 0.035%), topical system (patches, 8%)

Drug class: [Miscellaneous topical agents](#)

Medically reviewed by [Carmen Pope, BPharm](#). Last updated on Mar 3, 2025.

[Uses](#) [Warnings](#) [FAQ](#)

What is capsaicin?

Capsaicin is the active compound found in chili peppers that creates their characteristic heat. When applied topically, capsaicin works by temporarily depleting substance P, a neurotransmitter that sends pain signals to your brain. With repeated use, capsaicin can provide effective relief for various pain conditions.

Before starting any pain treatment regimen, consult with your healthcare provider to determine the most appropriate approach for your condition.

OTC Capsaicin Products

Strength and Concentration

Over-the-counter capsaicin products typically contain concentrations ranging from 0.025% to 0.1% capsaicin. These lower-concentration formulations are suitable for:

- Mild to moderate joint pain
- Muscle soreness
- Minor arthritis symptoms
- Back pain.

Popular OTC Brands

Some widely available over-the-counter capsaicin products include:

- [Aspercreme Warming Pain Relief Patch](#)
- [Capzasin-P](#)

- [Salonpas-Hot](#)
- [Zostrix](#).

Application and Usage

For OTC capsaicin products:

- Apply a small amount to affected areas 3-4 times daily
- Wash hands thoroughly after application
- Avoid contact with eyes, mouth, and sensitive areas
- Results typically improve with consistent use over 1-2 weeks.

Side Effects of OTC Capsaicin

Common side effects of over-the-counter capsaicin products include:

- Temporary burning sensation (expected and normal)
- Mild redness at application site
- Stinging
- Itching.

These effects usually diminish with continued use as the body adapts to the treatment.

Prescription-Strength Capsaicin Products

Strength and Concentration

Prescription capsaicin products contain significantly higher concentrations:

- [Qutenza](#) patch: 8% capsaicin (approximately 80 times stronger than typical OTC products)

Indications and Uses

Prescription-strength capsaicin is approved for specific conditions:

- Postherpetic neuralgia (lingering pain after shingles)
- Diabetic peripheral neuropathy.

Application and Administration

Unlike OTC products:

- Prescription capsaicin must be applied by healthcare professionals
- Treatment takes place in a medical setting
- Qutenza patches are applied for 30-60 minutes, depending on the condition
- Treatments may be repeated every 3 months.

Side Effects of Prescription Capsaicin

Potential side effects of prescription-strength capsaicin include:

- Intense burning at application site
- Significant pain during application (often requiring pre-treatment with anesthetics)
- Erythema (redness)
- Swelling
- Temporary increases in blood pressure during application
- Coughing or sneezing (from airborne particles)

Key Differences Between OTC and Prescription Capsaicin

Over-the-counter options provide accessible relief for mild to moderate pain, while prescription-strength formulations deliver powerful but controlled relief for specific neuropathic pain conditions under medical supervision.

Feature	OTC Capsaicin	Prescription Capsaicin
Concentration	0.025%-0.1%	8% (Qutenza)
Application	Self-applied at home	Applied by healthcare professionals
Duration	Multiple daily applications	Single application lasting 30-60 minutes
Treatment frequency	Daily use	Every 3 months
Cost	\$10-\$20 per tube	Several hundred dollars per treatment
Insurance coverage	Rarely covered	Often requires prior authorization

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Who Should Consider Capsaicin Products?

Capsaicin creams may be beneficial for people with:

- [Osteoarthritis](#)
- [Rheumatoid arthritis](#)
- Muscle sprains and strains
- [Diabetic neuropathy](#)
- [Post-herpetic neuralgia](#)
- [Fibromyalgia](#).

Precautions and Warnings

For all capsaicin products:

- Do not use on broken or irritated skin
- Keep away from eyes and mucous membranes
- Avoid using heating pads on treated areas
- Discontinue if excessive irritation occurs
- Consult a healthcare provider before use if you have sensitive skin
- Not recommended for children under 18 without medical supervision.

Tips for Using Capsaicin Effectively

- Start slowly: Begin with a small amount to test skin sensitivity
- Be consistent: OTC products work best with regular application
- Set expectations: Initial burning sensation is normal and expected
- Use protective gloves: Consider wearing disposable gloves during application
- Clean thoroughly: Wash hands with soap and water immediately after application
- Give it time: Full benefits may take 1-2 weeks of consistent use.

When to See a Doctor

Consult a healthcare provider if:

- OTC capsaicin products don't provide adequate relief
- Pain persists for more than two weeks

- Pain is accompanied by swelling, redness, or warmth
- You experience severe burning or blistering
- You're unsure if capsaicin is appropriate for your condition.

Popular FAQ

Does Qutenza contain red chili peppers?



References

1. [Capsaicin \(topical route\)](#). Mayo Clinic.
2. [Chang A, Rosani A, Quick J. Capsaicin. \[Updated 2023 May 23\]. In: StatPearls \[Internet\]. Treasure Island \(FL\): StatPearls Publishing; 2025 Jan.](#)
3. [Qutenza Package Insert](#)
4. [Capsaicin: Risks and Benefits. Pain Management. US Pharm. 2009;34\(7\):HS-17-HS-18.](#)

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Patient resources

Other brands

[Qutenza](#), [Zostrix](#), [Capzasin](#), [Trixaicin](#), ... +3 more

Professional resources

- [Capsaicin \(Topical\) monograph](#)
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Other brands

[Qutenza](#)

Related treatment guides


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Always consult your healthcare provider to ensure the information displayed on this page applies to your personal circumstances.


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DRUG STATUS

Availability
 Rx and/or OTC

Pregnancy & Lactation
 Risk data available

CSA Schedule*
N/A Not a controlled drug

Approval History
 Drug history at FDA



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