



## INTIMACY AND SEX IN SKIN CONDITIONS

*Written for families and young people (Key stage 3 and above)*

### WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS LEAFLET?

Living with a skin condition can affect many aspects of your life, including your sexual health and intimacy. Questions or concerns about this are normal, and you are not alone. This leaflet aims to provide information and support on:

- Common questions about how skin conditions can affect intimacy
- Explain that skin conditions are not a barrier to fulfilling intimate relationships
- Highlight things you can do to make intimate encounters easier if you have a skin condition.

### WHAT IS INTIMACY AND WHY ARE WE ADDRESSING INTIMACY IN SKIN CONDITIONS?

Intimacy is about two people sharing physical closeness in a way that feels safe and comfortable for them. This can include hugging, kissing, touching, sexual intimacy or intercourse.

Living with a skin condition doesn't just affect your body – it can also change how you feel about yourself and your relationships. When your skin is red, dry, infected, weeping, has scars, you might feel self-conscious or anxious about being seen without clothes or being touched.

Some people feel embarrassed if their skin smells or looks different, and this can lead to avoiding social situations or close contact with others.

Skin symptoms such as itchiness, soreness, or dryness – especially in private areas – can make touch uncomfortable or even painful. Even practical things, like needing to apply creams or ointments, can be messy or

interrupt the 'moment', making the experience feel mechanical.

### MY SKIN IS IMPACTING MY SEXUAL HEALTH AND INTIMACY. IS THIS NORMAL?

Yes, it is normal. No matter your age or experience, it's natural to sometimes feel self-conscious about your body, and this can affect intimate relationships. In fact, in a recent survey, more than half of young people with skin conditions said their skin had impacted their intimate relationships.

Skin conditions such as [eczema](#), [psoriasis](#), [acne](#), [hidradenitis suppurativa](#), lichen sclerosus, [pruritus ani](#) and many others, can affect how you feel about your body, your confidence, and even your physical comfort during sex. This may be especially true if the skin condition affects intimate areas

It's natural to step back from intimacy if your skin feels sore, itchy, or sensitive, or if you're worried about your partner's reaction. For some people, spending time alone – like through masturbation – can be a positive way to stay connected with their sexuality in a safe, comfortable way until they feel ready for closeness again.

### ARE THERE PRODUCTS I CAN USE TO MAKE INTIMACY MORE COMFORTABLE?

Yes. There are several products that can help make intimacy feel more comfortable and less stressful:

- Use gentle products: Avoid bubble baths, fragranced wipes, or harsh soaps and cleansers. Instead, choose plain, gentle washes or emollient creams designed for sensitive skin.
- Keep skin soft and protected: Regularly apply unperfumed moisturisers or



barrier creams (such as petroleum jelly) to reduce dryness and protect the skin.

- Try safe lubricants: If intimacy feels dry, uncomfortable or sore, water-based lubricants or special vaginal moisturisers can help. Avoid products with fragrance, tingling, or “warming” effects, as these may irritate sensitive skin.

## **CAN MY SKIN CONDITION BE PASSED ON TO MY PARTNER DURING INTIMACY?**

Most inflammatory skin conditions (such as hidradenitis suppurativa, psoriasis or eczema) are not contagious, so you don't need to worry about passing them on. However, it is best to check with your healthcare professional or get tested if you have concerns about an infection (such as a fungal rash or a sexually transmitted infection).

## **HOW DO I TALK WITH MY PARTNER ABOUT MY SKIN?**

Talking with your partner about your skin condition can feel daunting, but it's an important step in building trust, closeness and understanding. Here are some tips that might help:

- Choose the right time and place: Pick a calm, private moment when you both feel relaxed and not rushed or distracted.
- Be open and honest: Explain your skin condition in simple terms, for example, “I have a skin condition called [acne/eczema/psoriasis/etc], which sometimes makes my skin [dry/itchy/sore/painful/etc].”
- Share how it affects you: Talk about the ways it affects your confidence, comfort, or intimacy. For example, “Sometimes I feel self-conscious about how my skin looks” or “When my skin is sore, I might not feel comfortable having intimacy, my skin puts me in a bad mood/etc.”
- Offer reassurance: Many people worry skin conditions are contagious, so you can say, “It's not something you can catch, it's completely safe to touch me.”

- Invite questions and conversation: Encourage your partner to ask anything they'd like to know. This helps them better understand and support you.
- Inform early: Sometimes, informing your partner early helps them better understand you and find ways to support you. Keep the conversation open so you can talk as your needs and comfort levels change.

## **IF I HAVE A PARTNER, HOW CAN THEY SUPPORT ME?**

Your partner can play a big role in helping you feel more comfortable, confident and cared for. While many people with skin conditions worry about judgement, partners are often far more supportive than we expect. It's also worth remembering – we are our own worst critic.

Here are some ways a partners can support you:

- Being open and understanding: Encourage honest conversations about how your skin condition affects you, physically and emotionally.
- Being patient: Intimacy might need to be approached differently at times, and that's okay.
- Medication help: Your partner may offer to help by picking up medications for you or even applying medications in hard-to-reach areas (if you feel comfortable with that).
- Learning together: Your partner can read about your skin condition, attend appointments with you, and show they want to understand what you're going through.

Don't forget to reassure your partner too. Letting them know how much their support and acceptance means to you can strengthen your relationship and bring you closer together.

## **WHAT IF I FEEL TOO EMBARRASSED TO TALK ABOUT MY INTIMACY CONCERNS?**

It's completely normal to feel embarrassed or unsure when talking about intimacy or how



your body feels. These are very personal topics, and it's okay to take your time.

Talking openly with someone you trust – whether that's a partner, close friend, a parent, or a healthcare professional – can make a big difference. Sharing your thoughts can help you feel less alone, give you some answers and practical solutions and provide the support you need to feel more confident. You don't have to work through this on your own. Asking questions and getting help is a positive step towards feeling better.

If it is difficult to speak about this at first, you can write down your concerns or even take this leaflet along to your appointment to help start the conversation.

### WHAT CAN I DO IF I HAVE SKIN CONCERNS IMPACTING MY SEXUAL HEALTH AND INTIMACY?

- Practice self-care: Follow the advice on treatments and avoid triggers that worsen your condition. Use moisturisers or lubricants to help with skin dryness and soreness if needed.
- Communicate with any intimate partners: Sharing your feelings can help them understand and support you better.
- Talk to your healthcare professional: Sharing your experiences on how your skin is impacting your intimacy, and your mood, can help your healthcare professional understand how to best support you.

### WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT FROM MY HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL WHEN I DISCUSS MY INTIMACY CONCERNS?

- **A safe non-judgmental conversation:** Your healthcare professional is trained to discuss sensitive topics and will want to listen to your concerns.
- **Confidentiality:** You can feel safe being open and honest. Everything you share will remain private and only be discussed with other relevant healthcare professionals directly involved in your care. However, if there are safety concerns then your healthcare

professional may need to talk to relevant people in your interest.

- **Practical advice:** Your healthcare professional may suggest treatments to manage, improve or treat your skin condition. They might recommend products (such as gentle moisturisers or lubricants) to reduce irritation during sexual intimacy. If necessary, they can also refer you to a specialist (such as a dermatologist, sexual health specialist or psychosexual therapist).
- **Emotional support:** Your healthcare professional can help you explore how your skin condition is affecting your mental health and suggest counselling or support groups if this would be helpful.

### WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER INFORMATION?

If you would like more support, here are some useful resources:

- British Association of Dermatologists – Patient information leaflets: Provides information and resources about skin conditions. Visit [www.bad.org.uk/patient-information-leaflets/](http://www.bad.org.uk/patient-information-leaflets/)
- Healthtalk: Real-life experiences of people with health conditions shared online. Visit [healthtalk.org/](http://healthtalk.org/)
- A guide to sex and relationships. Visit [www.bishuk.com/](http://www.bishuk.com/)
- Free and confidential advice on sexual health. Visit [www.brook.org.uk/](http://www.brook.org.uk/)

### WHAT ARE SOME GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS?

These resources are for anyone who is struggling. They won't judge you.

- Mind: A mental health charity offering advice and support. Visit [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) or call 0300 123 3393
- YoungMinds: Supports young people's mental health and further information for parents. Visit [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- The Mix: Supports young people's mental health. Free, confidential support for



young people via online, social and mobile. Visit [www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk) or call 0808 808 4994

Skin conditions can affect how you feel about intimacy, but with the right support and approaches, it's absolutely possible to enjoy a fulfilling sex life and strong healthy relationship. Don't be afraid to reach out for help – whether from your partner, a friend, a family member, a healthcare professional, a therapist, or a trusted organisation.

You deserve to feel confident, comfortable and valued both in your skin and in your relationships.

*Please note that the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD) provides web links to additional resources to help people access a range of information about their treatment or skin condition. The views expressed in these external resources may not be shared by the BAD or its members. The BAD has no control of and does not endorse the content of external links.*



This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: individual patient circumstances may differ, which might alter both the advice and course of therapy given to you by your doctor.

*This leaflet has been assessed for readability by the British Association of Dermatologists' Patient Information Lay Review Panel*

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF  
DERMATOLOGISTS**

**PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET**

**PRODUCED | SEPTEMBER 2025**

**NEXT REVIEW DATE | SEPTEMBER 2028**

