

A small number of people who use FES will experience skin irritation. This can normally be treated and prevented from returning with careful management. This guide will help you to recognise skin irritation and understand how to manage it.

### What is skin irritation?

Skin irritation can be red patches, spots or blisters under or around the site of one or both electrodes.

A slight reddening of the skin underneath the electrodes is normal and should fade within an hour of removing the electrode. It happens due to an increased blood supply to the skin. If the red mark is still there the next day, it may be skin irritation.

### What should I do if I get skin irritation?

If you think that you may have skin irritation, you should stop using FES. If you continue to use FES on broken skin, it can make the problem worse and lead to an infection. You should also contact your FES clinician. They will give you advice on how to manage the irritation and when to return to using FES.

### What causes skin irritation?

Skin irritation can occur when the skin's natural barrier is broken. This can be due to:

- Scratching the skin
- Placing the electrode over a cut, rash, spot or insect bite
- Shaving your skin
- Using old, dried out, or dirty electrodes
- An allergic reaction to the electrode gel.

### How can I get rid of skin irritation?

Do not use FES on irritated skin, as this is likely to delay healing.

A plain moisturiser like E45 may be useful to soothe the irritated skin. Avoid scratching the skin, as this may make the problem worse. If the skin is slow to heal, weak steroid creams such as Eumovate (available without a prescription from a chemist) can be used. If this is not effective, ask your GP for advice.

### How do I prevent skin irritation happening again?

Make sure you change your electrodes regularly. Electrodes last about thirty applications or four weeks.

Good care of your electrodes is also very important:

- Rehydrate electrodes at the end of each day by applying a small amount of water to the gel surface. When not in use, store electrodes on the plastic backing sheet and place in the sealed plastic bag. This will help prevent electrodes from drying out.
- If there are skin cells stuck to the electrodes, gently wash them off with a little water and your finger.
- Electrodes should stick to the skin across the whole of its surface. Replace them if they become rough or pitted.
- Always remove your electrodes at night.



Keeping your skin in good condition is also important for managing skin irritation:

- Keep your skin clean using normal daily washing.
- Avoid very long baths as this will dry the skin.
- Do not use a razor to remove hairs. This may cause small scratches, which makes the skin more likely to be irritated. Use an electric shaver or scissors instead.
- If your skin is dry, apply moisturiser in the evening so it soaks in overnight.
- If your skin itches, try not to scratch it. This may break the skin's natural barrier.

### What if the irritation still comes back?

If your skin irritation comes back despite following the above advice, please get further advice from your GP or FES clinician. You may need to see Dermatology (skin specialists) if the irritation is severe.

Ask your FES clinician if you can alternate between more than one electrode position to rest the skin on the 'off' days. Your clinician may also make changes to the settings in your stimulator or offer you a different brand of electrode. You may also decide to wear your FES less often during the day.

**In most cases, skin irritation can be successfully managed and you can return to using your FES. It is important to treat skin irritation as soon as you notice it.**

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Further information can be found at:

<https://odstockmedical.com/knowledge/patient-information-sheet-skin-irritation/>