

Patient Information Leaflet: Topical Management of Eczema

What is Eczema?

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that causes dry, itchy, and inflamed skin. It can affect individuals of all ages but is most common in children. It can begin in infancy and a lot of children will grow out of their eczema during the first 5-10 years of childhood. Eczema can flare up due to various triggers, including allergens, irritants, weather changes, and stress.

Topical Treatments for Eczema:

Topical treatments play a crucial role in managing eczema by reducing inflammation, relieving symptoms, and maintaining skin hydration. The following are commonly used topical therapies for eczema:

1. Moisturisers:

- Regular use of moisturisers (emollients) is essential for managing eczema. They help restore the skin barrier and prevent skin dryness, which can trigger flare-ups.
- Choose fragrance-free, thick creams or ointments for better hydration.
- Apply moisturisers immediately after showering and several times a day, especially on dry areas.
- Moisturisers should be applied in downward direction on the limbs in the direction of hair growth to prevent folliculitis.

2. Topical Corticosteroids:

- These are anti-inflammatory creams or ointments that help reduce redness, swelling, and itching during flare-ups.
- Topical corticosteroids are available in creams, ointments, gels, lotions and shampoo formulations for different sites of the body.
- Your consultant will prescribe a specific corticosteroid based on the severity of your eczema and the area of the body being treated.
- Follow your doctor's instructions on the frequency and duration of use to minimise potential side effects. Do not use high-potency corticosteroids on sensitive areas unless directed.

3. Topical Calcineurin Inhibitors:

- These non-steroid medications (such as tacrolimus and pimecrolimus) help reduce inflammation and control itching.
- They are particularly useful for sensitive areas of skin (like the face and neck) and can be used for longer periods without any skin thinning side effects associated with corticosteroids.
- They sometimes can cause some stinging initially until you get used to them and this can be worse with alcohol.
- Follow your doctor's instructions for application.

4. Wet Wrap Therapy:

- This technique involves applying a moisturiser or topical medication to the affected areas, followed by wet bandages or clothing.
- Wet wraps can enhance the absorption of treatments and provide immediate relief from itching.
- These are most often reserved for more severe cases of eczema in children

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Application Tips:

- **Clean the Skin:** It is preferable to use soap substitutes to wash with. They are usually creamy lotions that prevent skin drying that can occur after washing. Mild shower gels or soaps designed for dry skin can be used for armpits and groins. Pat the skin dry with a soft towel.
- **Apply in Order:** Use moisturisers as frequently as needed, especially on days when the skin feels dry. Allow them to soak in for 20-30 minutes before applying any topical medications, which are best applied last thing before bed.
- **Be Gentle:** Avoid scrubbing the skin harshly. Instead, gently pat or dab to avoid irritation.

When to Use Topical Treatments:

- Use topical corticosteroids during flare-ups or when symptoms worsen to control inflammation.
- Use moisturisers regularly, even when the skin appears clear, to maintain the skin barrier and hydration and prevent flare-ups.
- Your consultant will provide a maintenance plan to manage long-term control.

Managing Eczema Flare-Ups:

- Identify and avoid triggers that worsen your eczema, such as certain foods, products, or environmental factors.
- Implement good skin care routines, including regular moisturising and gentle cleansing.
- Monitor and manage stress levels, as stress can be a trigger for eczema flares.
- Flares may require an increase in the use of the prescription based topical medications for 5-7 days to get the flare back under control.

When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If your eczema symptoms do not improve with topical treatments or become worse.
- If you notice signs of infection, such as increased redness, swelling, warmth, golden crust or pus, in the affected areas.
- If you wish to make changes to your treatment plan or have questions regarding your medications.

Conclusion:

Topical management of eczema is key to controlling symptoms and maintaining skin health. With consistent application of moisturisers and medications as prescribed, many individuals can effectively manage their eczema and reduce flare-ups.

For any questions or concerns about your eczema management plan, please consult your dermatologist.

