

Experts in Skin & Hair

Tacrolimus

What is Tacrolimus?

Tacrolimus (eg Protopic) is a non-steroid treatment for eczema. It is only available in an ointment formulation and it comes in two strengths, 0.03% and 0.1%. In addition to its license for eczema, it is often used off license for facial psoriasis.

When should I use it?

Tacrolimus can be applied once or twice daily to treat mild to moderate eczema. It is greasy and most patients will use this once daily in an evening. Tacrolimus is not as strong as some of the more potent steroids, so during an acute eczema flare you may need to revert to your topical steroids for a 3-5 days until the skin calms down again. It can be used though in the longer term for mild to moderate eczema on the body and face.

I've heard it can cause stinging, how can I limit this?

Tacrolimus can cause some irritation and stinging. This happens to 50% patients when they use it for the first time. Most patients get used to it within 1-2 weeks, so it is worth persevering. Stinging is worse if you drink alcohol, so consider having a break from alcohol for the first couple of weeks. The irritation is also worse if the ointment is applied to very active angry skin. It's often sensible to calm the skin first with a potent steroid for a week or so, then cut this down to alternate days, introducing Tacrolimus on the non-steroid day. After another week, the steroid can be cut down to 2 days and the Tacrolimus increased to the other 5 days. Another tip is to use Tacrolimus to normal skin, such as your forearm, for the first week when using the steroid treatment, giving your body a chance to get used to the treatment and then introduce on the alternate days as above.

Can I use this on the face?

Tacrolimus is a non-steroid ointment and can be used on the face, even on very sensitive skin such as the eyelids where steroids can't be used.

Do I continue to use it if my skin is back to normal?

Tacrolimus should be continued even if the skin does calm right down. It's sensible to continue on a daily basis for a couple of weeks after active eczema. It can then be cut down to two to three times weekly and used as a preventative treatment. If your eczema often flares in certain areas such as the face, neck, or arms, you can continue to use Tacrolimus in this intermittent fashion for the longer term, eg 4-6 months. Whilst Tacrolimus will not prevent eczema from flaring, it has been shown that by using twice weekly it will decrease the number of flare ups.

