



York and Scarborough  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# How to use moisturisers and topical steroids

Information for patients, relatives, and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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# Why is it important to care for my skin?

Many skin conditions can cause the skin to lose moisture, which can lead to your skin feeling dry, itchy, scaly, cracked, and sore.

# What will help?

Using a moisturiser can help rehydrate your skin and soothe the symptoms of itching, dryness and soreness.

A moisturiser can also improve the skins barrier function, helping prevent further moisture loss.

# Which moisturiser should I use?

A moisturiser can be oil based, a lotion, foam, gel, cream, or ointment.

Each of these moisturisers are prepared to give treatment to different skin conditions in different areas of your body.

Your consultant or nurse will advise which will suit your skin condition.

# When and how do I use my moisturiser?

- Wash with a soap substitute – avoid bars of soap or scented shower gels as these can further dry and irritate your skin. Your consultant or nurse can advise you.
- Use your moisturiser at least once a day or more if required.
- You may need to use more moisturiser than you expect. It is not unusual to use a 500g tub/bottle in a week.
- Moisturisers are most effective when applied immediately after bathing but can be used at other times.
- Apply your moisturiser in downward strokes to avoid blocking your hair follicles.

**Be aware that most moisturisers are flammable due to the presence of paraffin.**

**Wash your clothing and bedding regularly and avoid smoking or naked flames.**

# Topical steroids

## **What are topical steroids?**

'Topical' means applied directly to the skin

'Steroids' are synthetically made hormones

Topical steroids are used in the treatment of many skin conditions.

## **How do topical steroids work?**

Topical steroids help to reduce inflammation, speed up the healing of the skin, and help to make your skin less red, hot, itchy, and sore.

Topical steroids are not a cure for your skin condition but should help bring your skin condition under control and are available as a cream, lotion, foam, gel, and shampoo.

Your consultant will advise which topical steroid is appropriate.

## How do I apply my topical steroid?

- You may be given more than one topical steroid to treat different areas of the body.
- Make sure that you understand which topical steroid to use and where on your body to use it.
- If you are unsure, discuss with your pharmacist, consultant or nurse.
- Follow the application instructions carefully and use for the required length of time.
- Wash your hands before and after applying your topical steroid.
- Leave a gap of 30 minutes between applying your topical steroid and your moisturiser. This is to avoid diluting the topical steroid with the moisturiser and potentially spreading it to areas that it is not needed.
- Apply the steroid using the **Finger Tip Unit (FTU)**
- **FTU** is the amount of topical steroid that just covers the end of an adult finger from the tip to the crease of the first joint.
- One **FTU** is enough to cover an area the size of two adult hands with the fingers together.

The instructions can vary between patients depending on age and where on the body requires treatment, so please ask if you are unsure.



## **Are topical steroids safe to use?**

Topical steroids are safe and effective when used as directed and in combination with good skincare management.

Side effects can occur and are normally related to the potency of the topical steroid, where it is being used, the condition of the skin on which it is being used and the age of the person using the topical steroid.

Side effects can be reduced if you follow the application instructions carefully.

Fear of side effects can cause your skin condition to be under-treated. Stopping treatment too soon or not using the topical steroid at all will be detrimental to the overall management of your skin condition.

Pregnant women should consult their doctor regarding the continued use of their usual topical steroid.

Allergy to the topical steroid can occur but is rare. Please inform your doctor if your skin condition gets worse whilst using the topical steroid.

# Hand dermatitis: How to look after your hands

- Wash your hands with a soap substitute – avoiding soap bars or liquid soap.
- Dry your hands thoroughly.
- Apply your moisturiser after each wash to keep your hands in good condition.
- Use your topical steroid as prescribed to control the itch.
- Avoid contact with detergents and other items (including food) that may irritate your skin by wearing rubber gloves.
- Wear light cotton gloves under the rubber gloves to prevent your hands becoming too moist.
- Many commercial moisturisers contain perfume and all will have preservatives to which you could react. Your consultant can advise which product is suitable.
- Once you have had an episode of dermatitis it can take several months for your skin to fully heal.
- You will need to continue treating your skin as above even once the dermatitis has settled.

## Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

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## Teaching, training, and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training, and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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