

Topical Treatments

Soap Substitutes

For a number of dry skin conditions like eczema and psoriasis, it is important to avoid detergents that will remove the natural oils of the skin. Most shower gels and soaps are detergents, even if they say they are neutral pH or have added moisturisers. Soap substitutes are usually white lotions or creams that are applied after getting the skin wet and then rinsed off. They will clean but generally do not lather like soap.

Moisturisers / Emollients

Moisturisers are important in repairing the barrier of the skin in dry skin conditions. They hydrate, keep water in the skin and stop allergens and irritants penetrating through the skin. They vary from light creams to thick ointments. The lighter creams will soak in rapidly and need to be re-applied regularly. Ointments are more effective but are more greasy and sticky, so a balance has to be reached.

Moisturisers should be used liberally several times a day, always applying in the direction of the hairs, e.g. down the limbs. There is no limit to how much you can use, but they do not on their own switch off active inflammation in the skin.

Active treatments

Steroids

Often the mainstay of anti-inflammatory treatments for eczema and psoriasis are steroid based creams and ointments. Ointments are usually more effective, have a longer shelf life and contain fewer additives. This means they are less likely to cause any irritant or allergy problems in the longer term. Creams are more cosmetically acceptable as they rub in better.

Topical steroids come in a variety of strengths, with stronger ones being used on the body and weaker ones on the face and skin folds. The main side effect of the stronger steroids is thinning of the skin. This only occurs if they are used inappropriately, for example repeated application to the same site for months and months, without a break.

Because of the fear of skin thinning, most people underuse topical steroids by using too infrequently, using too little or using the wrong strength.

Steroid free anti-inflammatory treatments

They are some anti-inflammatory treatments that do not contain steroids and these are particularly useful for problems on the face. Tacrolimus and Pimecrolimus may cause stinging after application for the first couple of weeks, which lessens with time. Alcohol may make the stinging worse.

