


# NOTTINGHAM SUPPORT GROUP FOR CARERS OF CHILDREN WITH ECZEMA

In association with : Nottingham University Hospitals   
NHS Trust

Written by Professor Hywel Williams, Dr Ruth Murphy, Dr Jane Ravenscroft, Nurse Consultant Sandra Lawton and parents on behalf of the Nottingham Support Group for Carers of Children with Eczema.

## **Atopic Eczema and Steroid Creams Information for Parents**

Steroid creams and ointments are an effective and safe way of treating flare ups in atopic eczema. It is true that they do not treat the cause of the condition (which is a mixture of genetics and many environmental factors) but when used properly, they still offer the most effective and safe way of controlling eczema bringing back your child's quality of life.

### **Aren't Steroids bad for the skin ?**

If used properly, no. Unfortunately, many of the stronger steroid creams were used badly in the 1960s and 1970s. This resulted in side effects such as thinning of the skin and prominent stretch marks developing. This misuse has given corticosteroid creams a bad name, especially when people mix up these creams with steroid tablets and anabolic steroids taken by athletes - which are different from corticosteroid creams. In the 10 years that we have been looking after children with eczema in our clinic, we have not seen a single child with serious side effects from corticosteroid creams. Untreated eczema, on the other hand, does have very serious side effects. It can damage the skin and make your child's life very miserable.

### **Are all steroid creams the same ?**

No. They vary in strength from very mild to mild, moderate and strong. Generally speaking, sensitive areas such as the face and nappy area mainly need very mild steroid creams, whereas thick areas such as the palms, soles and scalp areas need moderate to strong preparations to have any impact.

### **What side effects can steroid creams have ?**

If strong steroid creams are used continuously for a long period, then the skin may begin to thin. Any skin thinning will usually go back to normal if the creams are stopped but some areas are particularly vulnerable to thinning effects such as face, armpits and nappy area. Some of the steroid creams are absorbed into the body's circulation and may partly suppress the body's natural defence mechanisms (adrenal glands). Again, this is extremely unlikely if you follow the golden rules summarised at the end of the leaflet.

### **Should I use steroid cream or a steroid ointment ?**

Generally speaking, dermatologists prefer you to use an ointment because this stays on the skin for longer and can therefore really get to work on your child's eczema. Also, dryness is a main feature of eczema and the greasy ointments help to counteract dryness. Some children cannot tolerate ointments and they prefer creams. Creams are white and contain a lot of water. Creams are easier to put onto weeping eczema compared to ointments.


### **Can I control my child's eczema with steroid creams only ?**

No. Steroid creams are only used to treat your child's eczema when the eczema is red and active and must be used with a regular moisturiser (emollient) when the eczema is in a quieter period. Using the steroid cream daily for 5-7 days, when the eczema is active, is probably the best way of using these creams. This should then be followed by a "holiday period" of emollients only. Sometimes, we recommend stepping down from a strong ointment for a few days through to a moderate ointment to be followed by a mild or very mild preparation to be used for longer periods, again with emollients.

website - [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk)

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## Six golden rules of using steroid creams in atopic eczema :

- Use the weakest possible cream that controls your child's eczema well.
- Use ointments rather than creams if possible.
- Use the preparations for short periods of 5-7 days at a time, followed by emollient holidays.
- Always use these creams/ointments along with your regular emollient, but allow at least 1 hour before applying the emollient, otherwise the emollient could dilute the effect of the steroid preparations. If used sensibly, steroid creams/ointments do not cause side effects of the skin, whereas untreated eczema can have serious consequences.
- Always remember to get more cream from your Doctor when your current tube is one quarter full
- Always take along your ointment tubes to your Doctor to monitor the quantities that you are using.

If you have any questions about Steroid creams or the information you have read in this leaflet, please discuss with the doctor or nurse caring for your child.

For further advice please contact  
Nurse Consultant Dermatology Sandra Lawton  
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Clifton Boulevard  
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NG7 2UH

Email : [pils@nottinghameczema.org.uk](mailto:pils@nottinghameczema.org.uk)  
Website : [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk)

For advice on support issues please contact the NSGCCE via the website [www.nottinghameczema.org.uk](http://www.nottinghameczema.org.uk) and click on the contact icon



at the top of most pages or email us at

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