

Compliance with Topical Steroids

Topical steroids, our go-to med in dermatology, is the mainstay of treatment for numerous skin conditions. It first became available for general use in the 1950's and has a long track record of safety and efficacy when used appropriately. Used appropriately, topical steroids provide a highly cost effective, widely available treatment for many patients and it is our job to help our patients use them toward the best results.

Sometimes uniformly effective results with topical steroids are not seen in clinical practice, and one of the reasons for this is non compliance with their use. Noncompliance can result in patient dissatisfaction with treatment, substantial costs due to repeated visits, trial of multiple different meds, and climbing the therapeutic ladder to use medications (other than steroids) that are much more costly with far more side effects. Several factors can contribute to non compliance with topical steroid use, and we can help the patient remedy many of them.

Patient forgetfulness can be remedied by prescribing the simplest regimen of application, keeping application regimen to once or twice daily. More frequent application has been shown not to be more effective. Help the patient to decide at which time of day they will be able to best adhere to the regimen.

Inconvenience of application can be decreased not only by a simple regimen, but also by dispensing the steroid in the form most amenable to the area treated. Gels and lotions for the scalp, ointment in scalp for patients of color (if they prefer...ask!), lotions for



application to larger areas where spreadability is important, and ointments chosen for use on areas with thick dermatoses. Again consider application times and/or occlusive wraps to avoid ruining clothing with ointments.

Often patients are unsure of how thick or thin to apply their medications, using too little or too much. Give patients a physical example of appropriate thickness of application with a bland emollient of similar texture to the medication (lotion, cream, ointment, or gel). It is often useful to demonstrate how to rub in the medication on the back of their hand.

For those patients, and parents of patients, with steroid phobia, you can help them by explaining the vast difference between short term topical and long term systemic steroids. Reassure them that you are giving the appropriate strength topical steroid for the skin condition, its extent and its location. All the while, you are keeping in mind the use of the lowest potency steroid which is effective for the condition. When their condition is cleared, give these patients tapering instructions and an endpoint for application (for example when they can no longer palpate the dermatitis with their eyes closed).

Discontinuation of medication due to lack of immediate results (overnight to less than a week's use!) can be

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avoided by informing patient about the disease process and expected time-line of improvement. Inform the patient if the condition is limited like poison ivy dermatitis, or chronic and recurrent, like seb derm, atopic and psoriasis. Help them understand the medication is not meant to be preventive, or used continuously when clear, but rather teach them, when to resume it for recurrences.

Finally, ask about noncompliance in a nonjudgmental manner. Help our patients get the most out of our first line medication in a variety of conditions from atopic to GA psoriasis to seb derm, before we move up to the next level. Preserve the usefulness of this highly effective, widely used, safe and cost effective medication by helping our patients to use it correctly and confidently with our instruction.

-Nora Kachaturoff, M.D

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- Laser Therapy
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- Removal of Skin Cancer, Warts and Scars
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- Eczema
- Psoriasis
- Vitiligo



Clinical Trials Corner

Hamzavi Dermatology Clinical Trials is Currently Seeking Study Participants with Conditions of:

- ACNE • PSORIASIS • WARTS • ROSACEA
- ACTINIC KERATOSIS (beginning stages of skin cancer)

If you, or someone you know, is interested in participating in a Clinical Trial please contact us at: **810-455-1612** or by email: clinicaltrials@hamzavi.com to see if you qualify today! All trials will be performed at our Fort Gratiot office.

Please note, you do not have to be a patient of our practice in order to be considered for any study.

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