

A practical guide to topical steroid therapy: the fingertip unit measurement¹

Using topical steroids correctly and effectively

Many people worry about using topical steroids, but if you know how to apply your cream or ointment properly then there is no need for concern. This information is designed to help you apply your steroid confidently and correctly.

When you experience a flare-up of your eczema you will need more than just your emollient alone to clear it up. Steroid creams and ointments (known as topical steroids) will either be prescribed to you by your doctor or given to you by a pharmacist.

What is a fingertip unit measurement?

Fingertip units can be a useful way to measure how much you need to apply. A fingertip unit (FTU) is the amount of cream/ointment squeezed from a tube with a 5 mm diameter nozzle, from the distal (first) skin-crease to the tip of the index finger.¹

Use an adult's fingertip.

When do I apply topical steroids?

- Normally only when your eczema flares up
- Once or twice a day, or as directed by your doctor

Where do I apply topical steroids?

- To red and inflamed areas of skin (active eczema) only
- Unlike your emollient you should not apply topical steroids to skin that is clear of eczema
- Can be applied to broken skin^{†2}

[†]skin with scratch wounds, inflamed eczema with oozing areas.

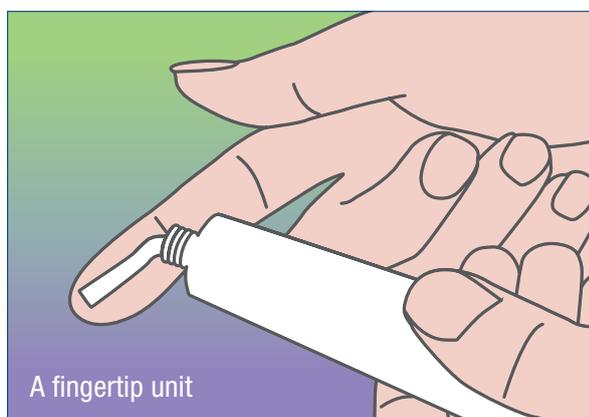
How do I apply topical steroids?

- Smooth in an amount to cover the inflamed area

How much topical steroid should I apply?

Area of the body (adult)	Fingertip units per day
Face and neck	2.5
Trunk (front <u>or</u> back)	7
Arm	3
Hand	1
Leg	6
Foot	2

Adapted from Long et al. (Ref. 1)

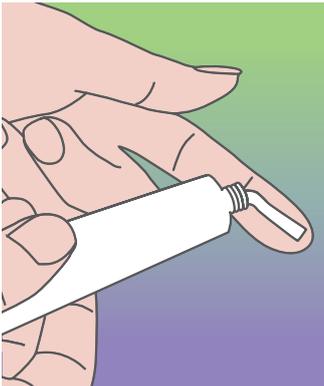


This educational guide is not to be used as a substitute for medical judgement, advice, diagnosis or treatment of any skin condition or problem. Please consult with your own doctor or pharmacist.*

How much to apply when treating children: a parent's guide³

Use the adult **fingertip unit (FTU)** as your guide.

The diagrams of the child (below) show how many adult fingertip units of cream or ointment are required to cover each area of your child's body, depending on their age.



Age	Face & Neck	Arm & Hand	Leg & Foot	Trunk (Front)	Trunk (Back) inc. Buttocks
3–6 months	1	1	1½	1	1½
1–2 years	1½	1½	2	2	3
3–5 years	1½	2	3	3	3½
6–10 years	2	2½	4½	3½	5
> 10 years (including adults)	2½	4	8	7	7

Adapted from Long et al. and AMH (Refs 3,4)

Your doctor or pharmacist may advise you to use topical steroids sparingly. This doesn't necessarily mean that you should only apply a small amount; you will need to apply a thin layer to each area of active eczema, so the amount you need will depend upon how much of your body or your child's body is affected. You may find it useful to think about how much to use in terms of fingertip units (see charts).

Remember, the amount of steroid you put on should always be far less than the amount of emollient you use.

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References: 1. Long CC, Finlay AY. The finger-tip unit – a new practical measure. *Clin Exp Dermatol* 1991;16:444-447. 2. Rubel D, Thirumoorthy T, Soebaryo RW, et al. Consensus guidelines for the management of atopic dermatitis: an Asia-Pacific perspective. *J Dermatol* 2013;40(3):160-71. 3. Long CC, Mills CM, Finlay AY. A practical guide to topical therapy in children. *Br J Dermatol* 1998;138:293-296. 4. Topical steroids – how much do I use? Updated May 2012, AMH Online [accessed 25 March 2014] (Australian Medicines Handbook) 2014.

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