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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: [patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk) if you would like a reference list.

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## **Topical Steroids** (page 1 of 2)

You have been prescribed an application containing a steroid to help suppress your skin condition. The following points may be helpful.

1. Steroids (cortico-steroids) occur naturally in the body and are produced daily by it.
2. Steroids are the simplest and most effective treatment for a variety of skin diseases. They have been available for over thirty years and a lot of experience has therefore been gained on how to use them. Before steroids were available to apply to the skin, many skin conditions were very difficult to treat, with sufferers spending months on end in hospital. Skin disease caused a great deal of interference with a sufferer's daily life and, in some instances, even loss of life. Since we have had steroid creams and ointments the ability to treat skin diseases has greatly improved.
3. Steroids used to treat skin conditions are not the anabolic (muscle building) steroids abused by some athletes. They will not make you put on weight or develop big muscles.
4. Steroids come in different strengths and the correct strength for your particular condition will have been chosen carefully.
5. You are likely to have heard of the side effects of steroids. These have been much exaggerated over the years and usually only arise from the abuse of topical steroids, not from their correct usage. The commonest side effect is skin thinning. This is of cosmetic importance only and results from prolonged use of a strong steroid on delicate areas of the skin. It does not occur after the short-term use of a steroid applied accurately and carefully to active skin disease. If steroids are used correctly they are very safe.
6. Hydrocortisone is a very weak steroid, although this is often the one that people have heard most about and are most frightened of, it is very safe and is available without a prescription from your chemist.
7. When using topical steroids, carefully follow the instructions that you have been given. Paint the ointment onto the affected area accurately and carefully with a cotton bud.
8. If you have been given more than one strength of steroid ointment, make sure you know which strength is for what. Generally speaking the stronger steroid should be used for short periods of time only and should be kept away from the face and from delicate areas of skin, such as where two surfaces of skin touch (for example the arm pits, groin, etc.).

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9. You are likely to have been given a moisturising cream to use in conjunction with your steroid. The moisturising cream should be used liberally and frequently. Apply the moisturising cream before, not after, applying the steroid. Keep using the moisturising cream after you have stopped using the steroid.

### **CAUTION**

Topical steroid medicines are only to be used on specific skin diseases. They may worsen other rashes such as athlete's foot or impetigo. Do not use your steroid ointment for the treatment of other rashes, and do not give it to other people to use on their skin.