







Formulations commonly seen are:

- Ointments are made of oils and little to no water and don't usually contain a preservative. They're great for dry, scaly skin or areas with thick skin like the soles of your feet and the palms of your hands, and are the strongest form of topical steroids.
- Creams, the form that's prescribed most often, are a mixture of water and oils and usually contains a preservative. They're especially good for hairy and wet areas and are easily applied without a greasy feel.
- Gels are made with water and propylene glycol and, like creams, they're easy to apply.
- Solutions, foams, and lotions usually contain oil, water, and other chemicals and are used on your scalp.

### **How Topical Steroids Help**

Topical steroids help by reducing inflammation in your skin. For example, if you have eczema and you experience a flare-up, you can apply a cream that decreases your skin irritation and makes your skin feel less itchy. This treatment helps you stop scratching the area and allows your skin to heal.

### **Why Potency Matters**

The appropriate strength for each person and situation depends on many factors. For example, babies absorb topical steroids faster than adults, so they may require a low-potency steroid. Areas of the body where your skin touches other skin (think armpits or groin), as well as sensitive areas like the skin on your eyelids, tend to absorb topical steroids more rapidly, so those regions of the body also usually require a low-potency steroid. However, thick, rough skin on the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet usually absorb topical steroids more slowly than other parts of the body, so those areas typically require a more potent steroid.

### **One more thing to keep in mind**

The greater the potency of the steroid --in other words, the lower its class number -- the more likely it is to cause side effects.