

Ask the doctor about ...

TOPICAL CALCINEURIN INHIBITORS



Dr. Michele Ramien

Eczema Society of Canada asked Canadian paediatric dermatologist and eczema expert Dr. Michele Ramien to discuss topical calcineurin inhibitors and their role in the management of eczema.

WHAT ARE TOPICAL CALCINEURIN INHIBITORS?

Topical calcineurin inhibitors (e.g. Protopic® and Elidel®) are a group of medications that help control the inflammation of eczema by quieting down an overactive immune response in the skin. Eczema flares occur due to an inflammatory response in the skin, and the immune system plays a role in this inflammation.

HOW DO YOU USE TOPICAL CALCINEURIN INHIBITORS?

Topical calcineurin inhibitors are topical medications which are applied directly to the skin. They come in either a cream or ointment formulation and can be used to help manage acute eczema flares or to prevent eczema from coming back in chronic recurrent areas. It may be helpful to ask your health care provider for a written care plan to learn about what treatment options are right for you, and to ensure you have clear instructions on which medication is applied to which area of the body.

IS A CREAM OR OINTMENT BASE BETTER?

The vehicle that delivers the topical calcineurin inhibitors is either a cream (as with Elidel®) or an ointment (as with Protopic®). Some users prefer the feeling of an ointment and others prefer a cream. Speak to your doctor about your preferences. Your doctor can help you find a

treatment regimen that is right for you. Generally speaking, ointments may be more hydrating to very dry skin, while creams may feel more comfortable on your skin and may be preferred before dressing.

HOW DO I USE THIS TREATMENT? DO I APPLY IT BEFORE OR AFTER MOISTURIZER?

Medications should always be applied to your skin before any other products, as moisturizers can create a barrier on the skin. Apply topical calcineurin inhibitors to affected areas first, then apply a moisturizer to the rest of the skin. Remember that your topical calcineurin inhibitor is already in a cream or an ointment base, which also acts as a moisturizer, so there is no need to apply additional moisturizer on top of your topical calcineurin inhibitor. Also keep in mind that it is recommended that topical calcineurin inhibitors be applied to dry skin, so if applying after the bath, remember to gently pat the skin dry first.

WILL THIS MEDICATION STING MY SKIN?

Some users report stinging, burning, or a sensation of warmth for a few minutes when the topical calcineurin inhibitor is first applied. For some people, this only occurs for the first few days of use. If this happens, it is recommended to avoid stopping and starting the treatment as this can make the burning sensation last longer. Generally speaking, if eczema is very active, some doctors will recommend that topical corticosteroids be used for a few days to calm the skin before using a topical calcineurin inhibitor, which may help to reduce stinging or burning associated with the medication. Speak with your prescribing health care provider about how you should use your topical treatments.