Top 6 Prescription Creams for Psoriasis

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Prescription Cream for Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a common skin condition that causes red, scaly patches that can be itchy and flaky. Though there are a variety of treatment options available, one of the most commonly-prescribed options is prescription cream for psoriasis.

Prescription Cream for Psoriasis

Creams for psoriasis are available over the counter (OTC) or as a prescription. They can be used as an adjunct to other therapies or as a standalone treatment.

Your healthcare provider will likely start treatment with cream and add other therapies as needed. Treatment options for psoriasis typically include:

- Topical creams, both OTC and prescription.
- Phototherapy, which involves the use of ultraviolet light.
- Systemic treatments, which can be provided as an oral medication or as an injection.

Top 6 Brands of Prescription Creams

1. Coal Tar

Coal tar can be purchased over the counter as a weaker formulation, or your healthcare provider can prescribe a stronger version. Coal tar may increase the risk of cancer, but only if used at very high doses. Be sure to follow your healthcare provider's instructions carefully if you are prescribed coal tar.

How Does It Work?
This cream helps to slow the growth of skin cells, inflammation and itchiness. Though it is the oldest treatment for psoriasis, it is not known how it works.

2. Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids can also be purchased over the counter, but a stronger version can be prescribed by your healthcare provider. They are the most effective psoriasis treatment.

Common corticosteroids include the following:

- **Clobetasal:** 0.05%, which comes as a cream, ointment, foam, or shampoo.
- **Triamcinolone:** 0.1% cream or ointment.
- **Hydrocortisone:** 2.5% cream.

They can also be prescribed in conjunction with vitamin D analogs or retinoids, which improve the effectiveness of the corticosteroid. These include the following:

- Taclonex (betamethasone/calcipotriene) cream.
- Enstilar (betamethasone/calcipotriene) foam.
- Duobrii (halobetasol/tazoterene) lotion.

How Does It Work?
Corticosteroids reduce inflammation, slow the production of skin cells and reduce itching. They should only be used as prescribed and in small areas, as these creams can cause thinning of the skin.

3. Vitamin D Analogs

Vitamin D analogs use man-made vitamin D. They are thought to be safer for long-term use than corticosteroids, though they can irritate the skin. In addition, they are often used in conjunction with other treatments.

Though these medications can be irritating, they typically have few side effects if they are used as prescribed.

Examples of vitamin D analogs include:

- Vectical (calcitriol).
- Calcipotriene (Dovonex, Sorilux).

How Does It Work?
Vitamin D analogs work by regulating the immune system, which helps to prevent the overgrowth of skin cells. In addition, they can reduce inflammation.

4. Calcineurin Inhibitors

Calcineurin inhibitors are particularly effective in treating psoriasis in sensitive areas, such as the scalp, the genitals and skin folds. It should be noted that these medications can be irritating. However, irritation typically improves within a week.

Though these creams are only FDA-approved for the treatment of eczema, they are often prescribed off-label for the treatment of psoriasis.

Examples of calcineurin inhibitors include:

- Elidel (pimecrolimus).
- Protopic (tacrolimus).

How Does It Work?
These medications are often prescribed when other treatment options do not work. They are powerful and assist with the reduction of inflammation and reduce the activity of the immune system.

5. Dithranol

Dithranol has been used for over 50 years. It is typically used as a short-term treatment in the hospital setting. It most commonly treats psoriasis of the limbs and the trunk.

When a healthcare provider prescribes dithranol, it is applied for 10 to 60 minutes, then removed. It is applied with the use of gloves as it can burn; it also stains everything that it encounters.

How Does It Work?
Dithranol assists with suppressing the production of skin cells.

6. Retinoids

Retinoids are made with vitamin A and come in varying strengths. They are also available in various formulations, such as foams, gels and creams. The most prescribed retinoid is Tazorac (tazorotene).

How Does It Work?
Retinoids work in the opposite effect compared to the other medications that we have prescribed; these medications speed up the growth of skin cells, allowing them to shed more quickly.

The Bottom Line

There are many treatment options available for psoriasis, from over the counter to prescription. They can be standalone treatments or layered in order to improve symptoms.