The "fingertip unit" of topical steroids

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This article was inspired by a comment from Dr Ewen McPhee (a rural GP) who mentioned the use of the "fingertip unit" in the article on topical corticosteroids.

The "fingertip unit" was originally described by Long and Finlay in 1991 and is a handy guide for both doctors and patients to describe quantities of corticosteroid cream (1).

In essence, one "fingertip unit" is equivalent to 20-25 mm of cream or ointment squeezed onto the "fingertip". One "fingertip unit" is approximately 0.5 g of cream or ointment enough to cover the front and back of a single hand.

Fingertip units for body surfaces

The following diagram was liberated from a dosing handout by Schering-Plough Pty Ltd for mometasone furoate 0.1% cream (Elocon):
Note: "hand" refers to the entire hand (i.e., palmar and dorsal surfaces)

For example:

An adult patient has atopic dermatitis over the trunk and back with an area equivalent in size to approximately 4 hand (palm) surfaces. The is equivalent to 2 fingertip units or 1 g of cream.

If the cream is applied once a day and the tube contains 30 g of corticosteroid cream, then we would expect that the tube should last approximately 30 days.

Reference article