

Approximating the Fingertip Unit for Moisturizer Application and Day Supply

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Fall brings with it a lot of changes. For those with eczema, psoriasis, other topical skin conditions and arthritis, fall weather exacerbates their conditions, and dry, cracked skin is often an inevitable result of the colder temperatures. To relieve the symptoms associated with dry, cracked skin, many people turn to over-the-counter lotions, moisturizers and creams.

Many moisturizers and lotions come in a variety of sizes, which can bring a plethora of questions to the pharmacy counter. In the retail setting, pharmacy technicians and other pharmacy staff members are uniquely poised to answer questions about non-medicated over-the-counter items. Retail pharmacy staff may relate to being asked questions like: How much moisturizer should I use? How long will this bottle of lotion last?

Guidance on how much lotion or moisturizer to use varies and most often involves using a common item like dice or a quarter to aid in application. However, based on eczema and atopic dermatitis research, the average optimal application amount for moisturizer is readily at hand. The fingertip unit, used to measure eczema medication, can be used to allocate lotion. A fingertip unit is an amount of moisturizer (or lotion) dispensed by a 5-mm nozzle from the first crease in the index finger to the tip; it ranges from 0.4 grams to 0.5 grams in adults (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The fingertip unit.

On average, it takes 40.5 fingertip units for adults to moisturize their entire skin surface as seen in Table 1; however, a good approximation for the 40.5 fingertip units can be obtained by starting at the crease where each finger/thumb meets the palm and dispensing moisturizer from a 5-mm opening until the tip of each finger/thumb, on one hand, is reached three times.

Table 1. Amount of moisturizer required for body parts in fingertip units and grams.

Body Part	Fingertip Units	Grams
Face and Neck	2.5	1.25
Front Torso	7	3.5
Back Torso	7	3.5
Two Arms	6	3
Two Hands	2	1
Two Legs	12	6
Two Feet	4	2
Total	40.5	20.25

Figure 2 shows this approximation on one hand. (Keep in mind that this is an average that allows for quick approximation, but results will vary based on the individual. For individuals with large or small digits, differing body surface areas, and bottle openings that are not 5 mm, some adjustment to this approximation will be necessary).

Each average full-body application using the fingertip approximation method is roughly 0.7 ounces of moisturizer;* therefore, for double-daily application, 1.4 ounces of moisturizer are used. Table 2 shows the day supply of various moisturizer sizes based on application frequency using the average fingertip approximation method.



Figure 2. The fingertip unit approximation on one hand.

Table 2. Day supply of moisturizer based on bottle size and application frequency.

Bottle Size	Once Daily Application	Twice Daily Application
10 ounces	14 days	7 days
12.5 ounces	17 days	9 days
15 ounces	21 days	11 days
20 ounces	28 days	14 days
25 ounces	35 days	18 days
30 ounces	42 days	21 days
50 ounces	71 days	35 days

Knowing how to measure and apply moisturizer properly can help pharmacy patients protect their skin from fall and winter weather.

*This approximation is an average based on the idea that many over-the-counter moisturizers and lotions are not used on the face and neck.