Fungal infections rebound with reckless use of topical steroid creams

- People trust quacks and end up buying the medication they prescribe
- Over-the-counter sale of such medicines exacerbates the situation

New Delhi, 21 October 2017: As per the most recent data available, India consumes about Rs1,400 crore worth of topical steroid creams. This is a segment with an annual growth of 16%. This figure, however, excludes the over-the-counter sales. Sale of topical steroids accounts for 82% topical dermatology market. What is alarming is that the top-selling combinations in these topical creams do not have any scientific rationale or logic behind them.

Even the strongest antifungal creams are unable to treat many fungal infections today. This is majorly due to topical steroid creams, which have turned these infections resilient. Topical steroid creams sell fast and are available anywhere over-the-counter. However, whether they are effective or not is still a question that remains unanswered.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, “Many fungal infections today tend to relapse as soon as the drug dosage is over. Resistance is a microbiological term based on lab data. However, these fungal infections are recalcitrant and are relapsing. Many topical creams are prescribed by quacks and other so-called medical practitioners. People trust them and buy these in order to get rid of the infections quickly. One major reason for this is also perhaps the fact that Indians are not very kind to those with any skin problems. Such use of creams without knowing their side effects can lead to a weakened immune response bringing back the infection when the dosage finishes. Fungal infections are also more pronounced today as many people prefer wearing tight-fitting clothes.”

Long-term use topical steroids can cause side effects, the most common being skin atrophy. This can become worse due to factors such as higher potency steroids, occlusion, thinner skin, and older patient age.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “The fact that such drugs can be prescribed by anyone brings us to a serious issue facing the medical profession today – that of quackery. Unqualified people are
masquerading as doctors. In the absence of doctors, people have no choice but to visit such quacks for treatment. The need of the hour is to create awareness among the masses about such people and the fact that one should not take medication unless prescribed by a registered medical practitioner. A stringent anti-quackery law also needs to be put in place.”

Here are some tips to prevent fungal infections.

- **Wear cotton underwear** Fungi thrive in a damp environment. Cotton clothes absorb moisture and perspiration better.
- **Maintain good personal hygiene** This one is a no-brainer. Whether it is your skin or the genital area, make sure you maintain hygiene and keep these areas clean.
- **Avoid tight-fitting clothes** Tight-fitting clothes do not allow the skin to breathe and should be avoided.
- **Avoid too many perfumed products** These can ay affect the delicate balance of yeast and bacteria and cause infections.
- **Destress** Research indicates that skin infections can flare up in stress. This is because stress lowers the body’s immune system.
- **Take natural yogurt with live cultures** Antibiotics destroy good bacteria in the body. Make sure you replenish the good bacteria by taking natural yogurt which contains friendly bacteria.

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**About IMA**: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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