



**The Leeds  
Teaching Hospitals**  
NHS Trust

# Ultraviolet A-1 treatment

Information for  
patients

Your doctor has referred you for a course of UVA-1 phototherapy, for your skin condition. This leaflet explains this treatment in detail, including its risks and benefits. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the doctor or nurse caring for you.

## **What is UVA-1 phototherapy?**

UVA-1 phototherapy is a treatment where the skin is exposed to a type of ultraviolet light. It is part of the types of ultraviolet rays given off by the sun. The purpose of the treatment is healing of the skin condition by this light. It achieves this in a number of ways, including reducing the activity of immune cells in the skin, which are overactive in many skin conditions. It also has an effect on fibroblast cells, which are responsible for the production of collagen in the skin. UVA-1 is principally used to treat morphea, scleroderma and granuloma annulare.

## **What does the treatment involve?**

UVA-1 therapy must be carried out in hospital under medical supervision. It will be necessary for you to attend three times per week during the course of treatment. The length of the treatment course will vary from one patient to another; an average course is usually between 8 - 10 weeks.

The time of exposure for your first treatment is decided from the reaction of your skin, in response to test doses carried out on a small area on your back or arm. After that, increasing doses will be given at each visit, depending on the reaction of your skin.

Light exposure will take place in a specially designed unit. We usually ask that you remove all your clothing. Each machine is screened off to make sure your treatment is given in private; however, men must wear genital protection. The practical aspects of this will be discussed with you by the nursing staff.

To make sure all your affected skin receives the UVA-1 treatment, we will give you specific instructions on how to position yourself on the unit to ensure that all of your skin is exposed evenly, each time. If you choose to wear underwear, please make sure it covers the same areas of skin on each visit. If an area of skin that has previously been covered is exposed to the UVA-1 treatment, it may burn.

Throughout the course of treatment, you should not sunbathe or use a sun bed at any time. On the day of treatment, you should avoid unnecessary exposure to direct sunlight (even through window glass). Cover up with loose fitting, long sleeved clothes. Use a sunscreen with an SPF factor of at least 20 that protects against UVA and UVB rays. Re-apply it regularly. You may also want to wear a hat after your treatment on sunny days, particularly if you don't have a lot of scalp hair.

Do not wear perfumes, deodorants, aftershave lotions or other cosmetic products before your treatment. Some of these contain substances, which make your skin more sensitive to light and can cause patchy discolouration of the skin which may take some months to fade. You can; however, use these after treatment. For the same reason, please let us know if you have started any new medications or creams, whilst having treatment, as some can make your skin more sensitive to the light.

For the phototherapy to be effective, you must also use the skin treatment prescribed by the supervising doctor; however, please do not apply any creams or ointments to your skin before you go in the machine, apart from an appropriate moisturiser. If you are not sure which moisturising creams you can use, please ask a member of the phototherapy unit staff.

## What are the possible side-effects?

1. There is a small risk that your skin may burn, with redness and soreness (particularly in patients with a very fair complexion). The risk of these effects are minimised by careful selection by the staff of the UVA-1 dose you will be given at each treatment. The risk of this can also be reduced by making sure that the same areas of your skin are exposed to the light at each treatment. If you should develop excessive redness of your skin following treatment, please contact the nursing staff in the dermatology department on **(0113) 392 4349**.
2. Some tanning of your skin is likely.
3. Very occasionally, patients develop polymorphic light eruption, which is an itchy rash due to sunlight.
4. Skin dryness. This can be helped with liberal use of moisturising creams. It is important that you use the topical treatment recommended by the department, during the course of treatment.

5. If you do not wear the protective goggles / visor during treatment, you risk developing a sunburn type reaction to your eyes and this may also increase your risk of developing cataracts in the future.
6. If you have a history of cold sores which are triggered by sun, these can also occur during UVA1 treatment.
7. Long-term use of UVA-1 (UVA-1 therapy over many years) causes premature ageing of the skin (dryness, freckling and wrinkling) and increases the risk of developing skin cancer. It is, therefore, our policy to limit the total amount of UVA-1 treatments you can receive.

## Practical points

- It is important that, in general, no clothing is worn whilst undergoing treatment in the light cubicle (except for male patients who need to wear genital protection).
- The eye protection used during light exposures in the cubicle should on no account be removed.
- Throughout the course of your treatment, you should not sunbathe or use a sun bed at any time. During bright sunny days, sun block may be required on exposed sites, e.g. face, neck and hands etc. Care should be taken when working in the garden, taking long walks or working outdoors, **especially on a day of treatment**. Protective clothing such as a hat, gloves and long sleeved garments are advised.

- **For your treatment to be effective, it is essential to attend regularly.** If you are unable to attend for treatment, you should telephone the nursing staff in the Dermatology department on **(0113) 392 4349** with an acceptable reason for cancelling. If you fail to attend for more than 3 treatments without telephoning with a reason, your treatment time will be given to another patient and you will be discharged back to the care of your GP or consultant.
- All of your valuables are your own responsibility.

## Storage of results

We will record the information about your treatment in an anonymous form on a secure database for audit purposes, in accordance with good medical practice. The anonymous data may also be used for research.

To help the smooth running of the unit and our endeavour to give a high standard of care, we would appreciate your co-operation in all of the above points.

# Personal Notes

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**What did you think of your care?**

Scan the QR code or visit [bit.ly/nhsleedsfft](https://bit.ly/nhsleedsfft)

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