



**The Leeds
Teaching Hospitals**
NHS Trust

Whole body PUVA treatment with oral Psoralen

Information for patients

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

What is PUVA?

PUVA is a treatment where a medication called Psoralen (P) is usually taken by mouth as a tablet. The skin is then exposed to UVA light. This is a type of ultraviolet light and is part of the types of ultraviolet rays given off by the sun. The purpose of the Psoralen is to make the skin more sensitive to healing by the 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.

Since 1974, PUVA has been widely used in this country, the USA and Europe for the treatment of a number of skin conditions including psoriasis and eczema.

What does the treatment involve?

PUVA therapy must be carried out in hospital under medical supervision. You will need to attend hospital twice a 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 Psoralen medication is taken by mouth, two hours before you attend the unit for exposure to the UVA light.

The tablets should not be taken on an empty stomach but with a snack or a light meal. The number of tablets prescribed by your doctor depends upon your height and weight.

The time of exposure for your first treatment is decided by the reaction of your skin to test doses on a small area of skin on your back or arm. Following this, increasing doses of light will be given at each visit, depending on the reaction of your skin.

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

To make sure all your affected skin receives the UVA treatment and is exposed evenly each time, we will give you specific instructions on how to stand in the machine. 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 PUVA treatment, it may burn.

Psoralen tablets make both the skin and the eyes sensitive to light for 24 hours. It is therefore very important that you wear protective glasses for 24 hours after you take your tablets, outdoors or indoors during daylight, and near any fluorescent light at night. You will also need to wear eye protection during the treatment itself. This protects your eyes against damage from PUVA.

Things to avoid

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 30 that protects against UVA and UVB rays. Re-apply it regularly. You may also want to wear a hat after your treatments 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 your skin which may take some months to fade. However, you can use these after treatment. For the same reason, please let us know if you have started any new medications or creams while having treatment, as some can make your skin more sensitive to light.
- For the treatment to be effective, you must 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.
- Alcohol **MUST** be avoided before your PUVA treatment.
- Although there is no clear evidence that PUVA can damage a developing foetus, for the absolute safety of the baby, you should not become pregnant during treatment.

What are the possible side-effects?

There is a small risk that your skin may burn, with redness and soreness and very rarely blistering (particularly in patients with a fair complexion), although the risk of these effects are minimised by the staff carefully selecting the appropriate UVA dose for you. 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 develop excessive redness of your skin following treatment, please contact the nursing staff in the dermatology department by telephoning **0113 392 4349**

- Some tanning of your skin is likely.
- Very occasionally patients develop polymorphic light eruption, which is an itchy rash usually triggered by sunlight. Some patients can also develop a rash called folliculitis (inflammation around hair follicles).
- Occasionally your skin condition could temporarily worsen in the early stages of treatment.
- PUVA pain/PUVA itch. This is a very rare side effect where patients develop a painful itching sensation of the skin. If this side effect occurs, treatment needs to be stopped.
- Skin dryness and itching. This can be helped with liberal use of moisturising creams. It is also important that you use all the topical treatment (creams and ointments) recommended by the department during the course of treatment.
- If you do not wear the eye protection in the unit and glasses for 24 hours after taking the psoralen tablets, you risk developing a sunburn like reaction to your eyes within a few hours of exposure. In the long term, there is also an

increased risk of developing cataracts if you do not wear the recommended eye protection.

- Nausea. This can be reduced by taking the Psoralen tablets with food. If severe, a different tablet can be given.

Long-term use of PUVA (repeated courses of PUVA 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 restrict the total amount of PUVA treatments that you can have. Present evidence suggests that you should not receive more than 150 treatments over a lifetime.

Practical points

The prescribed number of tablets should be taken two hours before attending the Unit for treatment. This is important to ensure the required concentration in the skin is reached.

The tablets should not be taken on an empty stomach but with a small amount of food.

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).

Protective glasses must be worn for 24 hours after taking your tablets, indoors and outdoors during daylight, and near any fluorescent light at night. Sunglasses or prescription glasses supplied by your optician with a special UV filter coating are suitable. These can be checked for you in the Unit. Many sunglasses manufacturers label their products as UV400 protection and these are particularly suitable. Protective glasses are also supplied by the unit.

On no account should the eye protection used during light exposure in the cabinet 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 or a relative should telephone the department and speak to the nursing staff, giving a reason for cancelling.

Telephone: 0113 392 4349

If you fail to attend for two treatments without contacting us, your treatment time will be given to another patient and you will be referred back to your GP or consultant

Valuables

All your valuables are your own responsibility.

Storage of results

We record the information about your treatment in an anonymised form on a secure database for audit purposes in accordance with good medical practice. The anonymised 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.



What did you think of your care?

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/nhsleedsfft

Your views matter



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