
Dermatology

Phototherapy Unit: PUVA Therapy

PUVA – What is it?

PUVA stands for Psoralen and Ultraviolet Light A (UVA).

Psoralens

Psoralens are chemicals which are found in many plants, including lime, lemon, celery, parsley, fig and clove. In PUVA therapy a psoralen drug is taken by mouth or applied to the skin as a soak or gel and the skin is then exposed to UVA. The psoralen acts by making the skin more sensitive to ultraviolet light.

PUVA

- Methoxypsoralen tablets should be taken prior to treatments (Methoxypsoralen-8, two hours before, Methoxypsoralen-5, three hours before). If the tablets cause nausea try taking them with a light meal or a glass of milk. Please inform the phototherapy nurse.
- Tell the nurse when you need some more Methoxypsoralen tablets as these are only available from the hospital pharmacy.
- Topical psoralens/soaks will be applied within the department.
- Blood tests will usually be performed before commencing full body PUVA therapy in order to confirm your suitability for starting treatment.

How PUVA works

In the presence of UVA, the Methoxypsoralen combines with the cells in the skin to slow down their rate of division. The treatment can cause a reddening of the skin and an increased production of the natural pigment melanin. This may give you a tan.

The PUVA machine

PUVA therapy needs large amounts of UVA. This is provided by fluorescent tubes with a special coating. These tubes emit the UVA needed for PUVA. The tubes are built into boxes, rather like shower cabinets, into which you step for treatment. Smaller PUVA units are used for treating the hands or feet.

During treatment you must wear goggles to protect your eyes; these will be supplied by the department. Make sure they fit correctly and do not allow any light to penetrate.

The treatment sessions

Fair skinned people, who burn easily, will have a shorter treatment time than dark skinned people who rarely burn in the sun. We may want to test your ultraviolet light sensitivity on the forearm before starting whole body treatment.

The treatment sessions may gradually be increased from a few minutes up to approximately 30 minutes if your skin tolerates the treatment and does not burn.

If you notice any burning or soreness tell the nurse before further treatment as the treatment time may need to be reduced or the affected area may need covering.

Frequency

Treatment is usually given twice a week and you can expect to attend for treatment for 10-12 weeks. Long term maintenance PUVA therapy is generally avoided to reduce the cumulative damaging effects of the UVA.

Unfortunately the clinic staff are unable to take care of children while you have treatment. We suggest that either you make alternative arrangements for childcare on the day of your appointment, or someone who is able to do this comes to the unit with you.

General Information

- **Glasses:** The Methoxypsoralen tablets will sensitise your skin and eyes to sunlight for about 12 hours. To prevent the possibility of cataract formation you must wear sunglasses, which protect your eyes against the UVA in daylight, for 12 hours after taking the tablets. The department can test your sunglasses for you. Sunglasses labelled UV 400/UVB/UVA protection 100% will be safe. If you would prefer glasses with clear lenses please mention this to staff. You do not need to wear protective glasses indoors if it is dark outside. Light bulbs and televisions do not emit significant amounts of UVA.
- **Skin protection:** Sunlight contains significant amounts of UVA which can cause burning if your skin is exposed for long periods after using psoralens. Therefore, during the summer, if you must go out for long periods, wear protective clothing and a good sunblock of SPF25 or more which has been recommended by your doctor. Remember that UVA radiation from the sun can penetrate glass and light fabrics, so remain in the shade if possible. Sun care products with UVA ***** (5 star) coding give maximum sun protection.
- **Moisturisers:** Dry, itchy skin can be treated by moisturisers, creams such as Aqueous cream, Diprobase, Doublebase, 50/50, E45 and Unguentum M. These are available on prescription and also over the counter in a pharmacy.
- Please inform the nurse or doctor if you have been started on any new medication as some medicines make you more sensitive to light.
- Women of childbearing age should not become pregnant while using psoralens, but previous use of PUVA does not affect subsequent pregnancies.

- You should not use a sunbed while on PUVA therapy.
- Prior to treatment, your skin should be clean and dry. You may apply water based emollients-Diprobase, Aqueous cream- to the skin before PUVA treatment, but try to ensure that the emollient is applied not less than two hours pre treatment.
- Do not wear deodorant, perfume or aftershave prior to treatment. Some of them contain oils, which sensitise the skin to light and may result in patchy discoloration of the skin. This takes many months to fade.
- Women do not need to wear underwear in the PUVA cabinet. Male patients are required to protect their genital area with dark underwear or a dark sock during treatment.

Side effects of PUVA

1. Your skin may burn, blister or become dry and itchy.
2. Long term use of PUVA may age the skin.
3. People who have had 150 or more PUVA sessions are about ten times more likely to develop skin growths and cancers. These are not serious if detected early – if you notice anything let the nurse, doctor or your GP know.
4. There is a theoretical risk of cataract formation in the eye, but this has not happened where eye protection has been used.
5. Oral psoralens may sometimes cause nausea and if necessary the type and dose of psoralen can be adjusted to suit the patient.

Help and advice if you experience problems following treatment

If you experience problems following your treatment – marked redness, soreness or blistering of the skin – please contact the Phototherapy Unit. The telephone number for the Phototherapy Unit at Addenbrooke's is: 01223 274408. The telephone number for the Phototherapy Unit at Hinchingsbrooke is: 01480 418704. Outside of the centre's normal working hours an answer machine will take messages or you can contact 01223 245151 and ask to be put through to the on call dermatologist.

Appointments

- Please try to be on time for your appointment as the clinic runs to a very tight schedule.
- If you are unable to keep an appointment please try to inform us so that your appointment time can be re-allocated. Three consecutive failures to keep an appointment without notice will result in your treatment being discontinued and your discharge from the Phototherapy Department.
- Appointments can be made in person at reception in the Phototherapy Unit or by telephoning the number below:

01223 274408 - Phototherapy Unit at Addenbrooke's Hospital

01480 418704 - Phototherapy Unit at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital

Self help groups

There are a number of self-help groups across the country. These groups offer support to sufferers, publish journals and encourage research. Here are some useful addresses.

Psoriasis Association

7 Milton Street
Northampton
NN2 7JG
Telephone: 01604 711129
Fax: 01604 792894
Email: mail@psoriasis.demon.co.uk
Website: www.psoriasis-association.org.uk

National Eczema Society

163 Eversholt Street
London
NW1 1BU
Telephone: 0207 388 4097
Fax: 0207 388 5882
Website: <http://www.eczema-org>

The Vitiligo Group

125 Kennington Road
London
SE11 6SF
Telephone: 0207 840 0855
Fax: 0207 840 0866
Website: www.VitiligoSociety-org.uk

Please feel free to ask the doctor or nurse about any problems you may have.



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking Helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact

Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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