Having daylight photodynamic therapy to treat actinic keratoses for your skin condition

Department of Dermatology

Information for Patients

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What is daylight photodynamic therapy?

Daylight photodynamic therapy is used to treat sun-damaged skin, this includes actinic keratoses. A gel is put on the sun-damaged skin. It is called photosensitising gel. It works when exposed to natural daylight. Once activated, the gel targets and destroys abnormal or damaged cells on the skin. The gel only targets abnormal or damaged cells. The surrounding healthy cells will not be harmed.

Sometimes the treatment must be repeated in a cycle to remove the lesions fully. The 'treatment area' is the area of skin which is exposed to the sun and has the gel applied. The gel can cause swelling and a tingling feeling during treatment. After the swelling has settled, the area of actinic keratosis should be improved.

Daylight photodynamic therapy clinic only happens between March and October each year. If you attend clinic and the weather is not suitable, you will be offered artificial daylight photodynamic therapy.

Daylight photodynamic therapy is licensed for the treatment of actinic keratoses to the scalp and head. Your doctor may want you to have this treatment for a different body part or a different condition. This would make the treatment off-licence. Dermatology products are often used off-licence. If your treatment is off-licence, your doctor will explain how this is in your best interest for your diagnosis and it will be clear on your consent form. All off-licenced treatments are reviewed and approved by the lead consultant for photodynamic therapy.

What are the possible side effects of treatment?

- It is common to feel tingling during treatment.
- After treatment the area can become swollen, sore, itchy, scabbed and red. This usually resolves within 2 weeks.
- After treatment the area can become infected, contact the clinic nurse in this case.

What do I need to do before my appointment?

We advise patients to apply moisturiser once per day for 1 week before treatment. You can use Vaseline or petroleum jelly or a urea-based moisturiser.

What to expect on the day of treatment

On the day of treatment, you should expect the following to happen:

- A member of the team will explain the treatment and check that you understand and consent to it.
- We will give you a chemical sunscreen. It needs to be put on to all exposed areas of your
- skin. This includes the treated area and any other skin which is not covered by your clothes. The sunscreen takes 10 minutes to dry. Try to wear clothes that expose the treatment area, for example if you are having your arms treated, wear a t-shirt.
- The treated area will be cleaned and prepared.
- The photosensitizing gel will be applied in a thin layer to the treatment area and the surrounding 5 millimetres of skin. This means the visible and non-visible areas of sun-damage is treated.
- You must then go outside within the next 30 minutes and stay in the daylight for the next 2 hours. You do not have to sit in the full sun, only the daylight. You can take shelter in the shade if you get too hot.
- If the 2 hours outside is interrupted (for example, to go to the toilet), you must time the interruption and add this time on at the end. You must be in daylight for a total of 2 hours, if this time is not met the treatment may not work as well.
- During treatment you may feel some tingling in the treatment area but do not worry. This is a common during the treatment.
- After 2 hours, the gel is removed.
- You must avoid sun exposure to the treatment area for the next 48 hours (2 days).

Aftercare for the treatment area

You should always wash your hands before touching the treated area to prevent infection.

- If you have pain, you can take over the counter pain relief like paracetamol. You can apply a cold wet clean flannel to the area if it feels like it is burning.
- Keep the area clean and dry for 2 days and protect it from the sun.
- After 2 days you can then wash the area with plain water.
- You should then apply a plain moisturiser like Vaseline or balneum to the treatment area until it heals.
- If scabs form, apply moisturiser to these too. Do not pick at the area whilst it heals.

After treatment

You should start a plan of sun protection after treatment and long term. This can include:

- avoiding the sun,
- wearing protective clothing,
- using sunscreen to exposed skin in hot weather (SPF30 plus),

This is to prevent the skin from getting further sun damage.

You may have a follow up appointment 3 months after treatment, either with the doctor or the nurse.

This is to review the outcome of the daylight photodynamic therapy and see if you need more treatment.

If you do need another cycle of treatment, this has to be at least 3 months after your first treatment.

More information

You can read more information from the British Association of Dermatology and DermNet which are trusted websites.

https://cdn.bad.org.uk/uploads/2021/12/09140231/Photodynamic-therapy-PIL-January-2023.pdf

http://dermnetnz.org/procedures/photodynamic-therapy.html

Contact details

St Peter's Health Centre: **0116 258 5221**

Melton Mowbray Hospital: **01664 800 106**

Loughborough Hospital: **01509 564 376**

Hinckley District Hospital: **01455 441 918**

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Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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