

Having topical PUVA phototherapy to treat a skin condition on your hands/feet

Dermatology Department

Information for Patients

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What is phototherapy?

- Phototherapy means to treat medical conditions with light.
- Ultraviolet A (UVA) and B (UVB) wavelengths are part of the spectrum of natural sunlight. These have been shown to be most effective in treating some skin conditions.
- We can reproduce these wavelengths of light. We use specially coated fluorescent tubes within our UV light cabinet.
- The type of phototherapy used depends on the skin condition that you have and how it responded to any earlier treatments.

What is topical PUVA?

PUVA involves combining a 'psoralen' solution with UVA treatment.

Psoralen is a chemical. It sensitises the skin to UV light. This makes the light treatment work better and reduces inflammation in the skin.

A psoralen solution can be put on the skin of the hands and/or feet by soaking them in the solution before exposure to the UVA light.

What conditions can topical PUVA be used for?

Topical PUVA is used in a range of skin conditions such as hand and foot eczema or psoriasis.

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Will it work for me?

Most people will see an improvement in their skin condition, but it does not work for everyone. The improvement may last weeks, months or sometimes years after you stop treatment.

You should not have PUVA phototherapy on your hands/feet if:

- you are unable to attend regularly for treatment.
- your skin condition is made worse by natural sunlight.
- you have had skin cancer, unless advised by your consultant.
- you are pregnant or breast feeding.
- you are taking any medications which make you more sensitive to sunlight or suppress the immune system, unless advised by your consultant.

First visit

On your first visit we will show you the phototherapy room.

We will ask you some questions and explain what is involved in the treatment. We will also answer any questions you may have.

Please bring a list of your current medications, creams and ointments.

We will then assess your skin so that we can check on your response to the treatment. The nurse may take photographs of your skin, Please let them know if you do not want photographs taken.

Space is limited in the treatment area. Please do not bring anyone else with you to your appointment unless you must. Please do not bring children with you to your appointment.

Children having treatment must have a parent or carer with them.

Please arrive on time. Allow plenty of time for parking. Clinics can be busy and you may not be offered treatment if you are late.

On the day of treatment

Your treatment will be 2 times per week. There needs to be at least a 2 day gap between treatments. Most people have between 15 and 30 treatments. This depends on your response to treatment and underlying skin condition.

You will be given a time for treatment. It is very important that you attend your appointments. Missed appointments reduce the effectiveness of treatment. It can increase your risk of sunburn. You must attend regularly.

The first few treatments will be quick. The length of time will usually get longer each visit.

- Your hands and/or feet will be soaked in a warm solution of psoralen and water for 10 to 15 minutes. You must move your hands and feet slowly in the water to make sure the solution is evenly distributed.

- You will then be given a towel to pat dry your hands and/or feet.
- You will then place your hands and/or feet on a unit containing special fluorescent tubes. A carefully measured dose of UVA light will be given.
- We will give you UVA protective goggles and a visor. You will need to wear these during treatment. Bring your goggles with you to every appointment. The visor is kept at the clinic.
- The nurse will assess your response to previous treatments each time you attend.
- Please tell them if you have any concerns or side effects.

What to bring with you

You will need to remove all jewellery that is on your hands or feet. It is important to make sure that the same areas are covered for every treatment to avoid burning.

Please wear comfortable clothing that covers the arms and legs, but which can be rolled up.

Before and after treatment

- You can use your usual moisturiser up to 2 hours before your treatment.
- Other creams or ointments such as steroid creams, Protopic (tacrolimus) ointment or Dovonex/Dovobet preparations should **not** be applied to areas to be treated with UV light on the morning of your treatment. If you are unsure, ask your phototherapy nurse.
- Do not use perfumed products such as body sprays, aftershave, perfumes or deodorant directly before treatment.
- Do not drink alcohol before treatment.
- Avoid large amounts of foods such as celery, carrots, figs, citrus fruits, parsnips and parsley. These can make you more sensitive to ultraviolet light.
- **Always moisturise after your treatment to stop dryness and itching.**
- You can use all your normal skin care products after treatment.
- Avoid further sun exposure or the use of sunbeds. More exposure to sunlight may cause burning. Wear a high factor sunscreen and cover up with a hat and long sleeves if outside in the sunshine.
- Please tell the nurse if you have started any new medications during your treatment as some medications can make your skin more sensitive to light.
- Avoid going to a sauna during your treatment as it can cause skin dryness.

Possible side effects

All reactions must be reported to staff so that the dose can be adjusted if needed.

Short term side effects

- Redness and discomfort, like mild sunburn.
- Itchy or dry skin. If you have this apply more moisturiser.
- Prickly heat rash (polymorphic light eruption or PLE).
- Feeling sick (nausea) due to the exposure to psoralen.
- Inflammation of the hair roots (folliculitis).
- Blisters in areas of treatment. Please contact the department if you develop blisters within 24 hours of your treatment.
- Some patients skin condition can get worse.

Possible long term risks

- Skin cancer - as with natural sunlight, prolonged and repeated courses of UV light can lead to a higher risk of skin cancer. There are no limits to the numbers of treatments you may have over a lifetime but having more than 200 PUVA treatments on your hands/feet means that you will need yearly skin checks to look for skin cancer. The nurse will keep a record of the amount of treatments you have had.
- Premature aging of the skin, freckling and wrinkling may be linked to long term UV light treatment.
- PUVA is not safe during pregnancy and breast feeding. If you think you may be pregnant or are planning to become pregnant please talk to the nurse.

Discharge information

You may be discharged after 24 to 30 treatments when your skin is clear or if there is no change to your skin. We do not continue treatment if there is no improvement.

After discharge you should carry on using your moisturisers daily, even if you cannot see your skin condition there.

If your skin condition comes back after you are discharged you can use your prescription creams to treat these areas.

After discharge you can 'top up' your skin with natural light. You can expose your skin to the sun in short periods to help your skin condition. Please avoid burning in the sun. We do not advise using sun beds.

If your skin condition comes back in the future you can have UVA phototherapy again. Please speak to your GP or dermatology doctor. They can refer you for another course of phototherapy if your last course worked well. We usually limit phototherapy courses to once per year.

What to do if you have any questions

Phototherapy staff are always happy to answer any questions that you may have, either at your first assessment or at any time during your course of treatment. Contact numbers and opening hours:

- **St Peters Health Centre (Leicester)** 0116 2585221
Monday to Friday - 8am to 5pm
- **Loughborough Hospital:** 01509 564375
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday - 8am to 5pm
- **Melton Hospital:** 01664 800118 (Phototherapy Room) or 01664 800127 (Nursing Office)
Tuesday and Friday - 7.30am to 11am
- **Hinckley Hospital:** 01455 441562
Tuesday and Thursday - 8.15am to 5pm

What to do if you cannot attend

Missing your appointments will mean your treatment will not work as well. You must attend regularly. If you think that you may have a problem with attending appointments then please talk to the nursing team and they will try to help you with this. If you have any holidays booked please let the nurses know.

If you are unable to attend for any reason please let the nurse know as soon as possible using the contact numbers above. If there is no answer, leave a message with your name, date of birth, contact details and/or hospital number if you know it.

If you do not attend 2 appointments without letting us know you will be discharged from the Phototherapy Department.

Where can I get more information?

British Association of Dermatologists (BAD): www.bad.org.uk/pils/phototherapy-topical-puva/

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