

# Having oral 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 the best in treating some skin conditions.
- We can reproduce these wavelengths of light using 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 previous treatments.

## What is PUVA?

PUVA involves taking a 'psoralen' tablet along with having the UVA treatment.

Psoralen is a chemical that sensitises the skin to UV light. This makes the light treatment more effective and reduces inflammation in the skin.

Psoralen is swallowed as a tablet 2 hours before treatment.

## What conditions can PUVA be used for?

PUVA is used in a range of skin conditions that affect the hands and feet such as eczema, psoriasis and palmoplantar pustulosis.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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## 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 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 breastfeeding.
- you are taking any medications which make you more sensitive to sunlight or suppress the immune system, unless advised by your consultant.
- you have severe liver or kidney disease.

## Your first visit

On your first visit you will be shown the phototherapy room by the nurse.

We will ask you some questions and explain what is involved in the treatment to you. 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 monitor 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 it is essential. 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 and 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 a week. There needs to be at least a 2 day gap between treatments. Most people have between 15 and 30 treatments depending 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 and can increase your risk of sunburn. It is essential that you attend regularly.

The first few treatments will usually be very quick, often less than a minute. The length of time will usually get longer at each visit.

We will provide you with protective goggles. You will need to wear during treatment. This is to protect your eyes from the UV light.

The nurse will assess your response to previous treatments each time you attend. Please tell them if you have any concerns or side effects.

## Taking psoralen tablets

You will be prescribed methoxypsoralen tablets. These have to be taken **2 hours before treatment**, with or after food.

You will need to buy glasses/ sunglasses with a minimum of UVA 400 protection. These are worn for 12 hours or until sunset after taking the tablets. The tablets make the eyes sensitive to light and protection is very important. If you do not protect your eyes at this time, it can cause long term damage. You must wear the sunglasses even if you are not outside. This is to protect your eyes from the UV that gets through windows and so on.

Psoralen sensitises all your skin to UV light, not just the treatment areas. This means you must be very careful. Use sunscreen and avoid exposure to UV light (including through windows) after your treatment and for the rest of the day.

## What to bring with you

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

You will need to remove all jewellery unless it is something you never take off such as a wedding ring.

## 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.
- Avoid 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 more sun exposure or the use of sunbeds. More exposure to sunlight may cause burning. Wear a high factor sunscreen and cover up with hat and long sleeves if outside in the sunshine. If you are sunburned from outside you cannot be treated until this has cleared.
- Please tell the nurse if you have started any new medications during your treatment as some medications can make your skin more sensitive to the light.
- Do not forget to wear your UV 400 protective glasses from when you take the psoralen tablet for at least 12 hours or until sunset that day. You must wear the sunglasses even if you are not outside. This is to protect your eyes from the UV that gets through windows and so on.
- 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. If you have many side effects, your treatment may be stopped.

### Short term side effects

- Redness and discomfort, similar to mild sunburn.
- Itchy or dry skin. If you experience this apply more moisturiser.
- Prickly heat rash (polymorphic light eruption or PLE).
- Coldsore. If you usually get coldsores, this may be worse during UV light treatment. Applying a high factor sun cream to your lips can help to stop this.
- Inflammation of the hair roots (folliculitis).
- Blisters in treatment areas. Please contact the department if you start to get blisters within 24 hours of your treatment.
- Feeling sick (nausea) as a result of the methoxypsoralen tablets.
- 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 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 also be linked to long term UV light treatment.
- There is a slight higher risk of cataracts if UV protective glasses are not worn after treatment.
- **PUVA treatment is not safe during pregnancy or breastfeeding.** If you think you may be pregnant or 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. We can go up to 40 treatments if needed to clear the skin.
- 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 who 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. This can be at your first assessment or at any time during your course of treatment.

Contact numbers and opening hours:

- **St Peters Health Centre:** 0116 258 7713 (Phototherapy Unit)  
Monday to Friday - 8am to 5pm
- **Loughborough Hospital:** 01509 564375 (Phototherapy Room)  
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. It is essential that you attend regularly. If you think that you may have a problem with attending appointments then please talk to the nursing team. 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. Call 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):

<http://www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets/phototherapy>

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