

## PUVA Treatment

This leaflet has been written to provide you with information on PUVA. It tells you what it is, how it is used to treat skin conditions and where you can find more information about it.

### What is PUVA?

PUVA is a treatment comprising psoralen tablets and exposure to **UVA** (ultraviolet A radiation) light which is part of natural sunlight. Psoralens are naturally occurring compounds found in many plants that make the skin temporarily sensitive to UVA to treat skin diseases.

### Where and when is the treatment carried out?

PUVA treatment is carried out in the Dermatology Day Treatment Centre on level 3 of the Lauriston Building. The telephone number is 0131 536 2063.

The unit is open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm. Treatment is usually given twice weekly on a Monday and Thursday or a Tuesday and Friday. Treatment does not usually start when you first attend the clinic for assessment. Appointments are pre-arranged and a course of treatment usually lasts around 3 months.

Car parking is limited to a small number of pay and display spaces in nearby streets and a pay car park in the Quatermile.

### How is PUVA treatment carried out?

- You will be prescribed psoralen tablets (the number of tablets required is determined by your height and weight); the tablets should be swallowed, after a small amount of food, two hours before your appointment. The timing is very critical.
- A test dose (minimal phototoxic dose or MPD) may be carried out on your forearm to assess the sensitivity of your skin; the result is checked 96 hours later.
- From the time you take the psoralen tablets you must wear sunglasses when outdoors in daylight for the following 24 hours. UVA can pass through glass so sunglasses should also be worn near windows inside buildings and cars. These need not be expensive but should be marked UV400. Some prescription spectacles have an invisible coating which blocks UVA. The phototherapy nurses check the UVA blocking capacity of your sunglasses/spectacles.
- Skin conditions on your body and face will be treated standing in a cabinet fitted

with UVA bulbs

- Skin conditions on your hands and/or feet will be treated by sitting at small units of UVA bulbs.
- All treatments are supervised by nurses and they will advise you on appropriate stance in the cabinet and positioning of hands on the handles or placement of hands and feet on the small units.
- You will be given protective goggles/glasses and sometimes a facial visor to wear during treatment.
- For whole body treatments male patients must shield their genital area (a sock is ideal).
- For localised treatments to hands and feet you will be given protective cuffs to wear.
- Treatment exposure lasts a few seconds at first and builds up to several minutes during the course.
- The phototherapy nurses, in consultation with medical staff, will assess your progress and discuss this with you. If you have any concerns or worries please discuss these with a phototherapy nurse.
- **It is very important that you attend regularly to aid progress and minimise side effects. If you fail to attend without good reason and notice you will be discharged from phototherapy.**

## Should I use topical treatments?

Dry scaly skin reduces the effectiveness of treatment so frequent and liberal use of emollients is advised, such as 50:50 white soft paraffin: liquid paraffin, Aveeno, Oilatum, Diprobase, Doublebase or Hydromol (you may need to use up to 500g per week).

However, on PUVA treatment days please do not use emollients in the 2 hours immediately before treatment unless otherwise instructed by phototherapy doctors or nurses. Yellow soft paraffin and salicylic acid block UV transmission so avoid these before PUVA sessions. For example, Hydromol ointment, Epaderm cream & ointment, Vaseline, Diprosalic cream.

If you have **psoriasis**, topical treatments other than emollients are not usually used at the start of the phototherapy course but may be added from your mid-way review.

If you have **eczema** or other conditions treated with topical steroids (such as Hydrocortisone, Eumovate, Betnovate, Synalar, Elocon) you should continue to use these until advised to gradually withdraw them. Avoid active treatments on your skin when you attend for each PUVA session e.g. Dovonex, Silkis, Exorex and steroids.

## What reasons might prevent you having a course of PUVA?

- If you are unable to attend regularly.
- If you are unable to stand unaided for several minutes (for whole body treatments only).
- If your skin condition is made worse by natural sunlight.
- If you have lupus erythematosus or xeroderma pigmentosa.
- If you have had skin cancer.

## Do I need to avoid anything during a course of PUVA?

- Make-up & foundation (before whole body treatment sessions only).
- Perfumed products, SPF (sun protection factor) -containing products & pain-relief skin gels before each treatment session.
- Wearing certain items of jewellery during treatment sessions - a phototherapy nurse will discuss this with you prior to starting a course of PUVA.
- Fake tan - the effects on ultraviolet treatment are unknown and it can cause difficulties assessing your skin.
- Female patients should avoid pregnancy.
- Sun exposure and sunbeds.
- Severe haircuts (for whole body treatments only) – this could result in burning of skin previously covered by your hair.
- Significant change in weight as the dose of tablets prescribed is based on your weight.
- Excessive quantities of celery, parsnip, citrus fruits, carrots, parsley and figs - they may make you more sensitive to the ultraviolet light.
- Starting new medications or skin preparations without informing a phototherapy nurse – some medicines and preparations can make your skin more sensitive to ultraviolet light including those which can be bought e.g. antihistamines, ibuprofen (by mouth or skin gel) and St John's Wort.

## Are there any side effects of PUVA treatment?

### During a course of PUVA:

- You may feel sick after taking psoralen tablets – inform a phototherapy nurse if this occurs.
- Burning of the skin occasionally occurs. The redness can take 2-3 days to appear and can last for more than a week. **If painful redness (with or without blisters) occurs you must contact the phototherapy department as soon as possible and you will be asked to attend for assessment and treatment.**
- Itching and dryness may occur. Emollients (moisturisers) such as 50:50 white soft paraffin:liquid paraffin, Diprobase, Oilatum, Hydromol, Aveeno or

Doublebase may be used. Uncommonly a prickling painful sensation of the skin can occur.

- Psoralen tablets can lead to increased caffeine levels. In susceptible people this can cause anxiety, irritability, restlessness and jitteriness. If you notice this you should reduce your intake of caffeine (such as in coffee, tea, caffeine-containing fizzy drinks and painkillers containing caffeine) for a few hours before and after taking your psoralen tablets.
- Cold sores – if you are prone to these they may occur during PUVA treatment.
- Rashes – if you are prone to developing a sunlight-induced rash such as polymorphic light eruption this may occur during PUVA treatment.

**Long term:**

- Premature ageing of the skin (wrinkling and discolouration) can occur after PUVA courses.
- Patients who had continuous PUVA treatment for several years or who have had around 10-15 PUVA courses of average length are at increased risk of developing some forms of skin cancer. For this reason we do not recommend maintenance treatment once the skin has cleared and we try to keep courses as short as possible and widely spaced. If you have had more than 200 PUVA treatments you will be offered annual skin cancer surveillance.

**Where can I find out more about PUVA?**

Further patient information on PUVA is available online in the patient information sections:

British Association of Dermatologists: [www.bad.org.uk](http://www.bad.org.uk)

Photonet (National Managed Clinical Network for Phototherapy):  
[www.photonet.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.photonet.scot.nhs.uk)