

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

Dermatology Department

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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 which have been shown to be most effective 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 to make 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 including eczema, psoriasis and palmoplantar pustulosis.

## Will it work for me?

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

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

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## **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.

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

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 twice per 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 therefore 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 which you will need to wear during treatment 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 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 24 hours after taking the tablets. The tablets make the eyes sensitive to light and protection is very important. If you don't protect your eyes at this time, it can cause long term damage.

Psoralen sensitises all your skin to UV light, not just the treatment areas. This means you must be very careful and 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 e.g. wedding ring.

## Before and after treatment

- You can use your usual moisturiser up to 2 hours before your treatment. However, 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 prevent dryness and itching.**
- You can use all your normal skin care products after treatment.
- Avoid additional sun exposure or the use of sunbeds. Additional exposure to sunlight may cause burning. Wear a high factor sunscreen and cover up with 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 the light.
- Do not forget to wear your UV protective glasses for 24 hours after treatment.
- 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 necessary.

## Short term side effects

- Redness and discomfort, similar to mild sunburn.
- Itchy or dry skin. If you experience this apply additional 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 prevent this.
- Inflammation of the hair roots (folliculitis).
- Blisters in treatment areas. Please contact the department if you develop 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 associated with long term UV light treatment.
- There is a slight increased 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.

## What to do if you have any questions

Phototherapy staff are always happy to answer any questions that you may have, either at your initial assessment or at any time during your course of treatment.

Contact numbers and opening hours:

- **Leicester Royal Infirmary:** 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 can't attend

Missing your appointments will mean your treatment will not work as well. It is therefore essential that you 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 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):

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

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)