

Patient information factsheet

Psoralen ultraviolet light A (PUVA) treatment

We have given you this factsheet because your dermatology (skin) doctor has referred you for a course of psoralen ultraviolet light A (PUVA) treatment. It explains what PUVA treatment is, how to prepare for it and the risks and benefits of the treatment. We hope it will answer any questions you may have. If you have any further questions, please talk to a member of the team using the contact details at the end of the factsheet.

What is PUVA treatment?

PUVA is a combination of a drug called psoralen (P) and ultraviolet light A (UVA).

Ultraviolet (UV) rays are produced by the sun and are grouped into different wavelengths. Ultraviolet light A (UVA) is one of the wavelengths that have been found to be useful in treating certain skin conditions.

How often will I need to have PUVA treatment?

You will need PUVA treatment sessions every Monday and Friday for up to fifteen weeks, unless your doctor tells you otherwise. You must make sure you can commit to the whole course of treatment before you start.

Before the UVA treatment

Before starting your treatment, we will ask you to sign a consent form. This means that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves.

We will need to test your skin's reaction to light before you start this treatment. We will test this on a Thursday and ask you to come back at the same time the following Monday so that we can assess the area tested. This will allow us to calculate your starting dose of treatment.

We will ask you to take psoralen before your UVA treatments. You must protect your skin and eyes from sunlight (even through window glass) for up to 24 hours after taking or bathing in psoralen. This is because psoralen makes your skin (and your eyes if you take psoralen tablets) sensitive to sunlight.

Psoralen can be taken in one of the following ways, depending on your skin condition.

Tablet PUVA (taking psoralen tablets by mouth)

We will give you psoralen tablets that you should take two hours before each UVA light treatment. You should take these with food to reduce the possibility of feeling sick.

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During the 12 hours after you have taken the psoralen tablets, you should:

- keep your skin covered with clothing and/or apply suncream
- wear glasses that protect your eyes from UVA
- reduce your exposure to sunlight through windows

In special circumstances, you should wear glasses that protect your eyes from UVA for 24 hours after you have taken the psoralen tablets. Your doctor will talk to you about this, if needed.

Bath PUVA (soaking your skin in psoralen liquid)

When you are in the dermatology centre, we will ask you to soak your body in a bath of water containing psoralen liquid for 15 minutes.

You will need to protect the areas of your body that are soaked in the bath from sunlight throughout your course of treatment.

Hand and foot PUVA (soaking your hands and/or feet in psoralen liquid)

Before your UVA treatment, we will ask you to soak your hands and/or feet in bowls of psoralen liquid and water for 15 minutes. You can do this at home or at the dermatology centre.

You will then need to cover your hands and/or feet with gloves and/or socks to protect them from the UVA in daylight.

The UVA treatment will be given to your hands and/or feet at the dermatology centre after 30 minutes (although it can be given up to two hours later). Your hands, feet, and anywhere along your forearms and lower legs that have been exposed to psoralen will need to be protected from sunlight throughout your course of treatment.

During PUVA treatment course

During the whole course of your PUVA treatment, **you should:**

- keep your skin covered and use a high factor sunscreen on exposed skin (such as face and hands) in sunny weather or when you are exposed to sunlight through window glass
- let the specialist nurses know if you start using any new medications or creams
- let the specialist nurses know if you experience any skin
 - redness
 - burning
 - blistering
 - itching

You should not:

- sunbathe or use a sun bed
- apply perfumes, deodorants, aftershave lotions, other cosmetic products, creams or ointments to your skin within a few hours before your treatment (these can be applied after you have had each PUVA treatment)
- attend PUVA treatment while under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs
- have a haircut during the whole course of your treatment if you are having your whole body treated (this will prevent burning of areas which were previously covered by hair, such as your neck, forehead or ears)
- take ibuprofen or naproxen (this may cause your skin to burn)

During each PUVA treatment session

You must wear protective eye goggles when having PUVA treatment. These will prevent damage to your eyes. We may also ask you to wear a protective face visor.

A specially trained nurse will give you your PUVA treatment in the Southampton dermatology centre. They will ask you some questions and may examine your skin each time you come to the centre for treatment.

They will help you to position yourself in a special cabinet. This cabinet contains fluorescent tubes that produce artificial UVA light. The correct dose will be calculated and the UVA light in the cabinet will be turned on.

The length of your treatment in the cabinet will depend on many factors, such as your skin type (fair or dark) and skin condition. We will increase the dose of UVA slightly with each treatment.

If you are having tablet or bath PUVA treatment for your whole body (with or without your face)

We will ask you to undress down to your underwear, remove any jewellery and stand in the UVA cabinet.

Male patients must cover their genitals with a snug fitting, close weave, dark coloured sock, thong or underwear. It is very important that the same area of skin is covered during each exposure to UVA. It is also very important that the covering is not removed during treatment. Removing the covering may lead to sunburn and the potential risk of skin cancer in this area.

If you are having hand and foot PUVA treatment

You will be asked to remove any jewellery on your hands and/or feet before placing them in the UVA cabinet.

What are the potential side effects of PUVA treatment?

Some side effects of PUVA treatments can be found below.

Redness, burning and blistering of the skin

UVA may cause your skin to become red, burnt and (rarely) blistered. We try to avoid this, but some tanning and redness of your skin is likely. Please let the nurses know if your skin becomes red, burnt or blistered after your PUVA treatment. This can develop within several hours to a few days after your treatment.

Dry skin, itching and discomfort

PUVA can cause dry and sometimes itchy skin, so it is important to apply moisturisers regularly after you have PUVA treatment.

Some people experience a burning discomfort that persists after their PUVA treatment. Please let the nurse know if you experience itching or discomfort during your course of PUVA treatment.

Premature skin ageing

Repeated use of PUVA may age your skin, so we try to keep the number of PUVA treatments as low as possible.

Nausea (feeling sick)

Nausea is a common side effect with the tablet form of psoralen. You can reduce the risk of nausea by taking the tablet with a light meal. If this does not help, you should let the specialist nurses know. We may be able to give you an anti-sickness tablet or a different form of psoralen.

Rashes

Your skin condition could worsen during treatment. Very occasionally patients develop an itchy, bumpy rash during treatment (known as polymorphic light eruption). If this happens, we may change your treatment to allow this to settle.

Cold sores

You may be at risk of developing cold sores during PUVA whole body treatment if you are already prone to these. You should wear lip salve/balm with sun protection to protect your lips.

Skin cancer

PUVA therapy may increase your risk of developing skin cancer. This risk increases with the number of PUVA treatments, so we will give you as few treatments as possible.

PUVA treatment during pregnancy

There is no evidence that PUVA can harm an unborn baby. However, if you think you are pregnant at any point during the course, we will stop your treatment until your baby is born.

How do I book appointments for PUVA treatment?

There is usually a waiting list for PUVA treatment. When it is your turn, the booking team will contact you by telephone or letter to book your individual appointment times. These can be booked from 7.15am to 11.45am and 1pm to 4.45pm, Monday and Friday (subject to availability).

We will try to offer you a convenient appointment time, which you will be asked to keep for all your appointments, if possible. PUVA appointments are confirmed with the specialist nurse on a week-by-week basis.

To make sure your treatment is successful you must attend all your appointments. Please let us know if you cannot attend for any reason. If you regularly miss treatments or take breaks without agreeing them in advance, your treatment may not be successful and you may be discharged.

Appointments for children

Appointments from 4pm onwards will only be given to children.

Alternative treatments

Your doctor has recommended this treatment for you. However, there may be other treatment options available, such as:

- narrowband UVB
- tablets
- injections

There are also creams and ointments that can be used alone or at the same time as your PUVA treatment. Please ask your doctor for more information.

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Contact us

You can contact our PUVA nurses if you have any queries or concerns.

PUVA nurses

Telephone: **023 8120 2870** (Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 7.15am to 11.45am and 1pm to 4.30pm)

Email: DermPPC@uhs.nhs.uk

Southampton dermatology centre

Level E

Fanshawe Wing

Royal South Hants Hospital

Southampton

SO14 0YG

Telephone: **023 8120 2871** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm, Thursday 8am to 2pm)

Useful links

www.bad.org.uk

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