

Patient information factsheet

Psoralen ultraviolet light A (PUVA) treatment Bath or basin soak

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 benefits and risks of the treatment. We hope it will answer any questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this 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.

Psoralen is a drug that makes the skin temporarily sensitive to UVA. It comes in several different forms, including a tablet or capsule that you take by mouth and a bath or basin soak. The form of psoralen we will give you will depend on your skin condition and the area that needs treating. This factsheet will focus specifically on bath or basin soak PUVA treatment.

How often will I need to have PUVA treatment?

You will need PUVA treatment sessions every Monday and Friday for up to 15 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 PUVA treatment

Consent

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.

Psoralen bath or basin soak (soaking your skin in psoralen liquid)

We will ask you to soak your skin in psoralen in a bath or basin before your UVA treatments. You must protect your skin from sunlight (even through window glass) for up to 24 hours after bathing or soaking in psoralen. This is because psoralen bath and basin soaks make your skin sensitive to sunlight.

Hand and foot PUVA

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.

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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 the PUVA treatment course

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

- keep your skin covered and use a high factor UVA protective or broad-spectrum sunscreen on exposed skin (such as face and hands) in sunny weather or when you are exposed to sunlight through window glass
- let us know if you start using any new medications or creams (some medications and creams can cause your skin to burn more quickly so we may need to pause or adjust your PUVA treatment)
- let us know if you experience any skin
 - redness
 - burning
 - blistering
 - itching
 - sensation changes (for example, tingling, prickling, reduced sensation, numbness or increased sensation)

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). Products on the skin may enhance or block the effect of PUVA, increasing the risk of burning or undertreating the skin condition. It also increases the risk of a burn next time if the product is not applied.
- attend PUVA treatment while under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs
- take ibuprofen or naproxen (this may cause your skin to burn)

During each PUVA treatment session

You must wear protective eye goggles or glasses when having PUVA treatment. These will prevent damage to your eyes.

A specially trained nurse will give you your PUVA treatment in the Southampton dermatology centre.

We will ask you some questions and may examine your skin each time you come to the centre for treatment.

The length of your treatment 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.

Hand and foot basin soak PUVA treatment

For this procedure, you will need to place your hands and/or feet into a special unit that contains fluorescent tubes that produce artificial UVA light.

We will ask you to remove any jewellery on your hands and/or feet before placing them into the UVA unit. This is because jewellery can increase your risk of burning if it is not worn consistently or is sitting in a different position as treatment times and UVA doses increase.

As you are getting ready, we will calculate the correct dose of UVA light to give you. We will then ask you to place your hands and/or feet into the UVA unit. Once we have correctly positioned your hands and/or feet, we will turn on the UVA light.

What are the potential side effects of bath or basin soak PUVA treatment?

Some side effects of bath or basin soak PUVA treatments can be found below.

Short-term side effects can include:

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 us 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.

Allergic eczema (contact dermatitis)

Some people may develop eczema if they have an allergy to the psoralen solution. Please let us know if your skin becomes:

- itchy
- blistered
- dry and cracked
- red (if you have a lighter skin tone) or dark brown, purple or grey (if you have a darker skin tone)

Pain

Some people experience a burning discomfort after having PUVA treatment. This discomfort can last from a few minutes to a few months. Please let us know if you experience severe, persistent prickling, burning or increased skin sensitivity during your course of PUVA treatment.

Rashes

Your skin condition could worsen during treatment. Very occasionally, people 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.

Other side effects

Occasionally, people may experience other side effects, such as:

- fingernail or toenail changes (for example, a change in colour or lifting of the nail)
- darkening of the skin
- inflammation of hair follicles causing spots

If you experience any of these side effects, please let us know.

Long-term side effects can include:

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.

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.

PUVA treatment during pregnancy and breastfeeding

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

You should **not** have PUVA treatment if you are breastfeeding.

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 8.15am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.45pm, Monday and Friday (subject to availability).

We will try to offer you a convenient appointment time, which we will ask you 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 with us in advance, your treatment may not be successful, and we may discharge you from our PUVA service.

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

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

PUVA nurses

Telephone: **023 8120 2870** (Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 8.15am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.45pm)

Email: dermatologynurseled@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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