

Patient information factsheet

Psoralen ultraviolet light A (PUVA) treatment Tablet or capsule

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 tablet or capsule PUVA treatment.

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 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.

Tests

We may need to test your skin's reaction to light before you start this treatment. If needed, 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.

Psoralen tablets or capsules

We will give you psoralen tablets or capsules to take by mouth **two hours** before each of your UVA treatments. The number of tablets or capsules you will need to take will be calculated based on your height and weight. For most people, this will usually be four or five tablets or capsules.

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You should take the psoralen tablets or capsules we have given you with food to reduce the possibility of feeling sick. To ensure the amount of psoralen you absorb is consistent each time you have treatment, you should try and eat a similar amount and type of food when taking the tablets or capsules. This will help to reduce your risk of a burn.

You must protect your skin and eyes from sunlight (even through window glass) for up to 24 hours after taking psoralen. This is because psoralen tablets or capsules make your skin and eyes sensitive to sunlight.

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

- keep your skin covered with clothing and/or apply UVA protective or broad-spectrum sunscreen
- wear glasses that protect your eyes from UVA (we will test your glasses before you take tablet or capsule psoralen to check they will protect your eyes)
- reduce your exposure to sunlight through windows
- avoid caffeinated foods and drinks, such as tea, coffee, and energy drinks (psoralen may increase the effect caffeine has on your body, causing you to feel jittery)

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

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
- 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 or glasses 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.

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.

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

For this procedure, you will need to undress fully (including removing any jewellery) and stand in a special cabinet that contains fluorescent tubes that produce artificial UVA light. We ask you to remove all clothing and jewellery because they prevent the light getting to your skin and can increase your risk of burning if they move position or are not worn consistently as treatment times and UVA doses increase (for example, if you were to wear a watch for twenty of your treatment sessions, but then didn't wear it for your next treatment session, your skin that has not been gradually introduced to the UVA light would be exposed and more likely to burn).

On the day of your first PUVA treatment, we will show you how to position yourself correctly in the UVA cabinet while you are still fully dressed. We will then ask you to go behind the curtained area around the UVA cabinet and undress fully.

We will then ask you to put on any necessary protective equipment, including:

- eye goggles or glasses
- a face visor (if appropriate)
- genital protective clothing (if you have male genitalia). Male genital skin is more sensitive to UVA light. To minimise exposure and to protect your genital skin, you must wear some form of genital protective clothing, such as a snug fitting, close weave, dark coloured sock, thong or underwear. It is very important that you wear the same protective clothing for each treatment as changing or removing this may lead to burning and the potential risk of skin cancer in this area.

As you are getting ready for the treatment, we will calculate the correct dose of UVA to give you.

Once you are inside the cabinet, we will verbally check you are in the correct position. We will then turn on the UVA light.

If you are having hand and foot 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 tablet and capsule PUVA treatment?

Some side effects of tablet and capsule 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.

Nausea (feeling sick)

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

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 or balm with sun protection to protect your lips.

Headaches

For the whole duration of your PUVA treatment (10 to 15 weeks), you should avoid taking ibuprofen or naproxen if you have a headache, as these medications may cause your skin to burn. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please contact us for advice. It is important that you let us know if you are experiencing more headaches than normal while having tablet or capsule PUVA treatment.

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:

- nervousness
- difficulty falling asleep
- dizziness
- low mood
- liver problems
- 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.

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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.

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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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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