

## What is PUVA?

PUVA is a combination of a drug called psoralen (P) and UVA. Psoralens are chemicals that are photosensitising which make us more sensitive to sunlight. Psoralens are found naturally in certain foods such as parsley, figs and parsnips but they are also manufactured to be used with UVA light to increase the effectiveness of ultraviolet light treatment.

Psoralens can either be taken as a tablet or can also be used in solution as a soak for small areas or for whole body treatments called bath PUVA. After the skin has been sensitised with the psoralen, UVA treatment is given by either standing in a cabinet where the whole body is exposed to UVA or with small light units that only treat specific areas such as hands and feet.

## How does it work?

We are not sure of the exact mechanism of how PUVA works, but we know UVA light causes changes in the body's immune system and in particular the cells responsible for causing inflammation to the skin. PUVA also affects the process of new skin cells being made.

## Which skin conditions is it used for?

PUVA can help various skin conditions, the most common is psoriasis, but it can also be helpful in other conditions such as eczema and light sensitive rashes.

## Why should I have PUVA treatment?

PUVA treatment should help to improve your skin condition. It is often recommended if you have tried ointments and creams (topical) without success. However, it is sometimes used in combination with creams that are applied directly to the skin.

## Are there any alternative treatments?

This treatment was recommended for you after consultation with your healthcare professional following both assessment of your skin and having considered other treatment options.

## How is treatment given?

You will be asked to sign a consent form, which confirms that you agree to have PUVA treatment and understand what it involves.

PUVA treatment is usually given twice weekly because any effects from the treatment such as pinkness, tightening and a warm feeling of the skin may take time to develop and settle down again before the next appointment. The nurse treating you will ask if you have experienced any of these symptoms at each visit so it is important that you are aware of these symptoms and report any reactions to the nurse. If you are having topical PUVA treatment, such as bath or hand and foot therapy, your treatment regime will be different from this and will be explained to you at the first appointment.

If you need to take psoralen tablets, these must be taken two hours before treatment for 8-methoxypsoralen and three hours before treatment for 5-methoxypsoralen, with a light meal or snack.

A course of treatment will vary dependent on your skin condition being treated and how you respond to the treatment. If you are having tablet PUVA you will also need to wear sunglasses that block UVA

light (UVA 400). The glasses must be worn from the time the psoralen tablets are taken and, following treatment, for the rest of the day.

It is also important to prevent exposing the treated areas of skin to sunlight during your course of treatment. This is particularly important if you are having bath or tablet PUVA.

Wearing a wide brimmed hat and applying sun block regularly will help prevent sun exposure to the face and neck.

Remember that UVA light is still present on a cloudy day. It also penetrates through window glass such as in a conservatory or car.

## **Possible side effects**

These can be both short and long term. If you experience any side effects please let the nurse know, either as soon as possible or at the next appointment.

### **Short term:**

Psoralen tablets can make you feel sick and should therefore be taken with a light meal or snack to reduce this.

PUVA can sometimes cause the skin to itch. This is usually temporary and improves when treatment is stopped. Antihistamines and steroid creams may help but occasionally treatment has to be postponed until symptoms subside.

Tanning of the skin will occur.

Occasionally sunburn reactions may occur.

### **Long term:**

UV light causes chronic irreversible changes to the skin such as ageing and wrinkling.

PUVA can also cause freckling called PUVA lentigo.

Treatment is known to increase the risks of skin cancer; the risk increases with the total number of treatments you have. It is therefore important that you regularly inspect your skin and let the nurse know of any new lesions or those present previously that are changing.

## **Important points of treatment**

We will discuss the following points that are important to adhere to in order to ensure effective and safe treatment.

**DO** make sure you take your psoralen tablet with a light snack or meal two hours before treatment for 8-methoxypsoralen and three hours before treatment for 5-methoxypsoralen.

**DO** make sure you use a moisturiser regularly throughout your course of treatment. However don't apply any moisturisers, perfume, aftershave or deodorant on your skin in the two hours before receiving treatment. Some of these contain substances that make your skin more sensitive to light. This can cause patchy discolouration of the skin and take some months to fade.

**DO** make sure you avoid exposing the skin to any forms of ultraviolet light during your course of treatment such as sunbathing or using a sunbed.

**DO** tell the clinic staff if you start any new tablets or creams during the course of your treatment as some can make you more sensitive to light.

**DO** make sure you are always wearing goggles when receiving your treatment unless advised otherwise by the nurse.

If you are taking psoralen tablets please make sure that you are wearing sunglasses that block UVA light (UVA 400) from the time the tablet is taken and following treatment, for the rest of the day.

Altering the length of your hair during treatment may mean exposing previously unexposed areas of skin resulting in burning.

**Please... arrive on time**

**attend regularly to ensure effective treatment**

**telephone if you are unable to attend**

**let the nurse know if you are concerned about any aspect of your treatment**

**If you have any further questions please telephone the Dermatology department on any of the numbers below:**

**01493 453545, 01493 453602 or 01493 453601 during the hours of 08:30 and 17:15 Monday to Friday**

### **Feedback**

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/ department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

**TRUST VALUES: We CARE for...**  
*our patients... each other... ourselves*

#### **BEHAVIOURS:**

**Courtesy and respect**

**Attentively kind and helpful**

**Responsive communication**

**Effective and professional**

**#Proud  
of the  
Paget**



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

**For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240**