

## **PUVA Phototherapy**

### *What to expect and possible risks*

*This handout explains what to expect and the possible risks when having phototherapy (light treatments) with PUVA (psoralen plus UVA).*

### **What is PUVA phototherapy?**

PUVA phototherapy is used to treat skin diseases.

- *Phototherapy* means “treatment with light.”
- UVA stands for *ultraviolet A*. UVA is a natural light found in sunlight.
- The “P” in PUVA stands for *psoralen*. Psoralens are drugs that increase light sensitivity.

For PUVA treatment, you will first take a dose of psoralen as prescribed. You will then have light treatments in a special machine that emits **only** UVA light.



*You will take your dose of psoralen before your phototherapy treatment.*

### **What can I expect?**

- You must sign a consent form before starting your phototherapy treatments.
- There are different brands of psoralen drugs. If you are taking:
  - **Oxsoralen-Ultra**, take your dose **1 to 1½ hours before** your UVA treatment.
  - **8-Methoxypsoralen**, take your dose **2 hours before** your UVA treatment.
- Treatments are usually given 2 to 3 times a week. You must wait at least 48 hours between treatments.

- Before each treatment session, your phototherapy nurse will ask:
  - Have you had any reactions to your other phototherapy treatments?
  - Are you taking any new medicines? Medicines can change your sensitivity to the light treatments. You must tell your nurse about all new medicines you are taking before each phototherapy session.

## For Your Safety

Psoralen will make your eyes sensitive to sunlight for 24 hours after you take it. **For 24 hours after taking the medicine:**

- **You must wear protective glasses with side shields** to protect your eyes from sunlight. This includes both outside light and light that comes in through a window.
- **Avoid going outside, even on a cloudy day.** If you must be outside, wear protective clothing and sunscreen. Make sure your sunscreen is **broad-spectrum, with an SPF of 30 or higher.**

## Does PUVA phototherapy carry any risks?

### Short-term Risks

- We do not know if it is safe to have PUVA phototherapy during pregnancy. You should not be pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or nursing while you are having PUVA treatments. If you are sexually active, you must use reliable contraception to avoid pregnancy.
- About 1 out of 5 patients (20%) have nausea (upset stomach) or stomach pain after taking the psoralen. To help ease this problem:
  - Take the medicine with milk, crackers, or in the middle of a small meal. Choose foods that are low in fat and grain-based. Try to eat the same things every time so your body absorbs the medicine in the same way every time.
  - Try drinking ginger tea or eating ginger cookies to help with the nausea.
- After your treatment, you can expect tanning, mild redness, itching, and dryness in your skin. Using moisturizing creams can help.
- At first, your skin may get worse with PUVA treatment. Please let your nurse know if this happens.
- You may also have patchy changes in skin color. Areas of both lighter skin and darker skin can form. These color changes may not go away.
- Very rarely, patients have changes in blood counts and liver tests after PUVA phototherapy. Your provider will monitor your blood tests every 6 to 12 months while you are taking psoralen.

## Long-term Risks

- **Eye damage:**
  - Too much ultraviolet (UV) light can damage your eyes. We provide protective eyewear that you must wear during all phototherapy sessions.
  - We advise that you have an eye exam within 6 months of starting PUVA treatment. If you keep having treatments, have eye exams once a year.
- **Photoaging:** Repeated and prolonged exposure to UVA light can cause early aging of the skin. Signs of early aging can include wrinkling and color changes.
- **Skin cancer:** There is a higher risk of skin cancer after having many PUVA treatments. About 25 out of 100 people (25%) who have more than 200 total PUVA treatments get skin cancer.
  - Men who have phototherapy may have a higher risk of skin cancer of the genitals. We provide a protective covering that men must place over their genitals during their phototherapy sessions.

## Your Personal Items

You may need to wear a long-sleeved shirt or other clothing to help protect your skin during treatment. We can keep your personal items in a basket at the Dermatology Center between treatments, or you can take your items home and wash them as needed. We are not responsible for lost or stolen items, but we have never had any problems in this area.

When you are done with your treatments, or you stop having sessions for 2 months or more, you must take home all personal items you have left here. Dermatology staff may dispose of items without notice if you do not collect them within 2 months of your last treatment.

## When to Call

Call the phototherapy nurse at 206.598.4067 if you have any of these symptoms after your phototherapy treatment:

- Redness that lasts more than 24 hours
- Blistering
- Skin pain
- Fever and chills

## Before Your Treatment

Before you have phototherapy treatments, please be sure that you agree with these statements:

- I have signed a consent form.
- I understand that having PUVA therapy carries some risks. I have received information from my healthcare provider about these risks.
- At every visit, I will tell the phototherapy nurse about any new medicines I am taking and any unusual skin changes.
- I will visit the Dermatology Center for yearly skin exams after I am done with my phototherapy treatments.
- I understand that Dermatology Center staff may dispose of any personal items I left in the clinic if it has been more than 2 months since my last treatment.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., call the Dermatology Center at 206.598.4067. When you hear the recording, press 8.