



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Receiving PUVA Treatment in the Dermatology Out-patient Department

Information for patients, relatives, and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Dermatology Department York

York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE
Telephone: 01904 726621

Dermatology Department Scarborough

Scarborough Hospital, Woodlands Drive,
Scarborough, YO12 6QL
Telephone: 01723 342492

Outpatient Department Selby

The New Selby War Memorial Hospital,
Doncaster Road, Selby, YO8 9BX
Telephone: 01904 724296

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This leaflet will give you information about the treatment that has been recommended for your skin condition and give you the answers to questions most commonly asked by patients. If you have other questions that are not covered, please ask at your next appointment or call the numbers highlighted on the front page.

What is PUVA therapy?

PUVA is an ultra-violet (UV) light therapy.

It consists of using a medication called Psoralen (P) then exposing the skin to UVA light.

P + UV = PUVA

Psoralen is a drug that will make your skin more sensitive to UVA.

It can be taken by tablet or in a solution mixed in a bath or hand and foot soak before each of your light treatments. Very occasionally for some patients it is used as paint or gel on the skin.

You will be treated with UVA light which is emitted by florescent light tubes.

How often do I have treatment?

PUVA is given twice weekly (Monday and Thursday or Tuesday and Friday), it is essential to leave two days between each treatment. A course of PUVA will require a variable number of visits, dependant on the condition being treated.

It is very important that you attend **all** appointments to maximise the benefit of treatment. If you are unable to attend, please contact the department. If you fail to attend more than three treatments without informing staff, your treatment time may be given to another patient and your treatment may be stopped and you could be discharged.

What will be involved in my treatment?

You will be offered an appointment for an assessment before starting PUVA treatment.

Please bring a list of your current medications and creams or topical treatments you are currently using.

We will discuss your treatment and assess your skin condition. If your skin condition allows, we may do a test dose of light therapy on an area of unaffected skin. There is a possibility that we may not be able to carry out this test if your skin condition is extensive. The nurse may then assess your skin to determine your skin type before commencement of your light treatment.

If we are able to do a test dose on your skin, you will return to the department three days later and the nurse will assess the results of your test dose. You will then be given your first light treatment in the department. The length of treatment in the light machine will gradually increase dependent on response.

Before having your treatment, you will be provided with close fitting goggles or glasses, which must be worn throughout treatment to protect your eyes. **Do not open your eyes during treatment.**

If you are having your full body treated, you will stand unclothed in a cabinet with fluorescent light tubes. However, you may be asked to wear dark, close-weave clothing during treatment to protect any areas of your skin that do not require treatment. The same clothes **must** be worn during every treatment.

Men will be advised to bring a dark, close-weave scrotal support or sock to be worn over the genital area while having treatment.

If you are having whole body PUVA please avoid having a haircut during your course of treatment, especially after the first two weeks. This is to avoid exposing new areas and risk burning.

If you are having your hands and/or feet treated, it is important that all other areas of skin are covered and protected from the light during treatment.

What is involved in taking Psoralen?

By tablet

- Baseline blood samples may be needed for some patients.
- You will need to take the Psoralen tablet **two hours** before you have light therapy.
- Take the tablet with a light meal, it should not be taken on an empty stomach.
- Your eyes will need to be protected from other sources of UV light for 12 hours from taking the tablet. Some patients with higher risk such as children or those with a history of cataracts may need protection for 24 hours. Protection is required from sunlight through window glass, bare fluorescent tubes, and halogen lamps (not those which have plastic diffusion cover or ordinary light bulbs).
- You will need to purchase a pair of sunglasses or UV protection coated glasses from a reputable optician/ retailer (these should be “labelled UV400” with the European standard EN 1836-2005).
- It is also important that you shield your skin from the sun with suitable clothing for 12 hours after taking the Psoralen tablet (this should even be done on overcast days).

By solution (whole body or hands and/or feet)

- It is important to ensure the Psoralen is well mixed in the water and covers the areas of skin requiring treatment.
- For bath PUVA (whole body) you will soak in the solution for 15 minutes before having light therapy.
- Avoid splashing your face when soaking in the bath.
- For treating hands and feet you will soak in the solution for 15 minutes. If you require treatment of your palms or soles, you will then need to wait up to 30 minutes before the light therapy. This is not needed if only the tops of your hands and feet need treatment.
- Eye protection is not necessary during the soaking period.
- After soaking in the Psoralen solution, it is important that you pat the area dry with a towel before UV light is administered.
- After treatment the areas soaked with Psoralen must be thoroughly washed with soap and water and fully covered prior to leaving the department.

By gel

- Psoralen gel is applied to areas requiring treatment, then you will wait 30 minutes for this to absorb into the skin before light therapy.

By paint

- Psoralen paint is applied to areas requiring treatment, then you will have to wait 15 minutes for this to absorb into the skin before the light therapy.

What are the benefits of this treatment?

PUVA therapy can improve many skin conditions although it is not a cure. Patients usually start PUVA therapy when other forms of treatment have not suited them. The outcome of treatment can vary for patients.

What are the immediate risks with this treatment?

- The main risk of PUVA is a sunburn type reaction, this can occur up to 48-72 hours after treatment. We try to avoid this by increasing light therapy slowly. We will also assess your skin at each treatment.
- Your skin will remain light sensitive for several hours after treatment with Psoralen, precautions need to be taken as outlined.
- It is important for male genitalia to be covered during light therapy due to an increased risk of skin cancer to this area.
- Some people have dry/ itchy skin after a course of PUVA, regular use of moisturisers or emollients can help relieve this.
- PUVA usually causes tanning of the skin. Even though the skin may appear tanned, it may still easily burn in the sun.
- Occasionally PUVA therapy is not suitable for some patients, and they may have to stop treatment.

Please report any side effects before your next treatment. If you have felt sick or had any burning or tingling on your skin, then please tell the staff.

What are the long-term risks?

- Like exposure to natural sunlight, PUVA therapy can lead to premature ageing of the skin, this is also associated with an increased risk of skin cancer.

Factors such as how easily your skin burns and lifetime exposure to sun can contribute to an increased risk of skin cancer. The actual risk levels are thought to be very low but increase with repeated treatments over many years. To reduce the risks, we try to keep the course of light treatment as short as possible.

Most PUVA cancers are easily treated and are cured at an early stage.

If you notice any skin changes for example the beginning of a small lump or have any concerns, please tell the Dermatology clinic staff or your GP.

- The lens in the eye can become damaged from prolonged UV exposure, this is not a risk if suitable eye protection is worn during treatment.

After you have reviewed the reason for the treatment, risks and precautions (on the next page), you will be asked to sign a consent form (FYCON192-3 PUVA Light Treatment) confirming you are willing to proceed with treatment. You will be offered a copy of the form and a copy will be placed in your patient notes.

General points and precautions to remember during PUVA therapy

- Moisturising cream or ointment (emollient) may be part of your treatment for your skin. If having tablet PUVA try to apply your moisturiser at the same time interval before each treatment as it can affect how you react to the light. Please inform the department of any changes to your regime.
- PUVA is not recommended during pregnancy. You should avoid getting pregnant while you are having a course of PUVA.
- Perfumes can make you more sensitive to sunlight. Avoid using scented products such as bath foam, perfumes, and after-shave lotions in the four hours before having PUVA.
- Certain drugs can make your skin more sensitive to the UV light, please tell staff if you are taking any new medication.
- Avoid any other forms of UV light e.g., sunbathing or sun beds during your PUVA treatment. It is recommended to use sunscreen on exposed areas at least SPF30 plus and 3- or 4-star UVA protection.

Further contacts:

If you have any questions or concerns about PUVA therapy you can phone us during the clinic opening times, which are as follows: -

York Clinic

Telephone: 01904 726621

Monday to Friday

Scarborough Clinic

Telephone: 01723 342492

Monday, Wednesday and Friday

Selby Clinic

Telephone: 01904 724296

Monday to Friday

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:
Katy Maskell, Sister, Dermatology Department, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 726621.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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