

Department of Dermatology, Churchill Hospital
Hand and Foot
PUVA Treatment
Information for patients



What is Hand and Foot PUVA?

PUVA is a form of therapy in which a combination of Psoralen (a medication) and UVA (ultraviolet A) light are used to treat certain skin conditions.

Psoralens are chemicals, found in a variety of plants, which temporarily make the skin very sensitive to the effects of UVA light.

PUVA can be used to treat the entire skin, or just localised areas, such as the hands and feet.

With hand and foot PUVA, a psoralen gel is applied to the affected areas 15 minutes before each treatment with the UVA lamp.

Uses

Localised PUVA may be used to treat a number of skin conditions, including:

- Palmoplantar pustulosis / Psoriasis of the hands and feet
- Hand and foot dermatitis/eczema
- Vitiligo

Treatment course

The treatments are usually given twice a week, for up to 10 weeks. Depending on the response, some patients require a longer course, and a few patients may need to continue this treatment long-term, albeit less frequently (for example, once per week).

How long does each treatment take?

The gel is applied by one of the nurses in the clinic 15 minutes before exposure to the UVA light. The exposure time to the UVA light is initially short (to avoid burning the skin) but is gradually increased as your skin becomes accustomed to the UVA. The maximum duration of UVA light exposure is seldom longer than ten minutes.

How long do the benefits last?

PUVA treatment does not cure psoriasis or eczema, however most patients find that their condition remains clear for several months, and often much longer. The results of PUVA on vitiligo are less predictable.

Side effects

All treatments have associated risks and side effects, although for most patients undergoing hand and foot PUVA these are minimal, and well tolerated. Talk to your phototherapy nurse about any problems you are experiencing during the treatment.

Burning

Like natural sunlight, PUVA therapy can cause a sunburn-like reaction, particularly in people with fair skin. This most often occurs 48-72 hours after the second or third treatment. Because of this, the initial dose of light (i.e. the time spent exposed to the UVA lamp) you receive is kept very low, and then gradually increased. The phototherapy nurse will assess your skin's response to the light and make adjustments as required. You may need to skip one or two treatments.

It is important to remember that skin that has been treated with psoralens will remain light sensitive for several hours and should be protected from sunlight after your treatment, even on overcast days, by wearing gloves and fitted shoes and socks.

Dry or itchy skin

It is common for the skin to feel itchy for a short time after each treatment, and your skin may become dryer than usual. Regular use of a moisturiser usually helps improve both of these problems.

Long-term side effects

PUVA, like natural sunlight, can cause the skin to age prematurely, and may be associated with a slightly increased risk of developing skin cancer. The risk of developing skin cancer is

related to your lifetime exposure to the sun as well as other factors, such as how easily you burn – the additional risk of hand and foot PUVA is very small, but is higher if you have repeated courses of this treatment over many years.

It is important to check over your skin regularly and report any new lesions of concern to your local doctor. Oxford department of

If you have further questions please contact:

Dermatology Department

Churchill Hospital
Old Road
Oxford
OX3 7LE

Telephone number

01865 228226 (Phototherapy)

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call

01865 221473 or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

Stephanie Arnold/Vanessa Venning
Oxford Department of Dermatology
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Oxford University Hospital NHS Trust
Oxford OX3 9DU
www.ouh.nhs.uk