

Photodynamic Therapy (PDT)

Patient Education

About Photodynamic Therapy

Photodynamic therapy (PDT) is a treatment for skin lesions called Actinic Keratoses (pre skin cancers). PDT is also used to treat some skin cancers on the surface of the skin.

PDT is a 2-step process:

1. A medication will be put on the treatment area to make it very sensitive to light. You must wait **1 hour** for the medication to be absorbed.
2. A Blue light will be shined on the area. The light reacts with the medication and destroys the Actinic Keratoses.

Preparing for Your Treatment

Tell your doctor or nurse if you:

- Take any medications. You may have to stop taking some medications because they may change the way PDT works. Tell your doctor or nurse if you take any of the following:
 - Medications that require a prescription
 - Medications that don't require a prescription
 - Retinoids / Retina / Tretinoin
 - Herbal remedies
 - Vitamins
 - Dietary supplements
- Have had cold sores or shingles that keep coming back.
- Currently have a cold sore or shingles outbreak.
- Have porphyria, a rare disorder that makes your skin sensitive to the sun.
- Are allergic to 5-aminolevulinic acid (ALA).
- Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. This medication has not been used with pregnant women, so we don't know if it's safe.

- Are sensitive to light or the sun.

The Day of Your Treatment

- Don't use creams, lotions, or makeup on the treatment area.
- Bring something to protect the treatment area from the weather.
 - If the treatment area is on your face, bring a wide-brimmed hat or umbrella.
 - If it isn't on your face, wear clothing that covers the area.
- Plan to be at your appointment for 2 hours.

During your treatment

- Before your treatment starts, you will wash the treatment area with soap and water.
- Your nurse will apply acetone or alcohol to remove any oils and prepare the treatment area.
- Your nurse will apply medication to the treatment area. The medication will make your skin sensitive to sunlight. Your doctor will tell you how long it will take for the medication to be absorbed. This could be up to 1 hour.
- A Blue light will be shined on the treatment area. This will activate the medication. Your nurse will give you eye protection to wear during the light treatment.
- During the light treatment, you may have some discomfort. People describe it as stinging, prickling, or burning sensations. This usually goes away after treatment, but may take up to 24 hours.

After Your Treatment

Everyone responds differently to this treatment. For a few days, you may have the following things on the treated area(s):

- Redness that feels like a sunburn
- Slight swelling
- Peeling
- Itching
- Scaling
- Crusting
- Tingling
- Oozing

You may also have mild flu-like symptoms.

Caring for yourself at home

Follow the guidelines below to help manage side effects.

- Apply a cool compress to the treated area a few times a day for the first 24 hours. To do this, take a clean washcloth, dip it into room temperature or cool water, wring it out, and gently apply it to the treated area. When the cool sensation goes away, soak the cloth again and repeat.
- Starting the day after your treatment, use a gentle, fragrance-free cleanser (such as Cetaphil®, Dove®, Basis®, or Eucerin®) to clean the treated area. Use a clean towel to pat your skin dry, and avoid rubbing the area. Then, apply a moisturizer (such as Cetaphil, Lubriderm®, Aquaphor®, or Vaseline®) to the area to keep your skin moist.
- If you have discomfort after your treatment, take an over-the-counter medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), or aspirin. If you're allergic to these medications, or if you can't take them due to a medical condition, talk with your healthcare provider about which medication to take instead.
- For 48 hours after your treatment, don't expose the treated area to bright light. This includes:
 - Direct sunlight
 - Indirect sunlight
 - Very bright indoor lights (such as spotlights, photocopy machines, and medical exam lights). Normal house lighting is okay.
- If you must be outside after your treatment, protect the treated area from the sun. If you can't cover the treated area, use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 directly on the area. Broad spectrum means it protects against both UVA and UVB rays. If the treated area is on your face, wear a wide brimmed hat.
- After 48 hours, continue to use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 on the treated area.
- If a scab forms on the treated area, don't remove or pick at it. Apply a moisturizer.
- Return to the office for your follow-up appointment according to your doctor's instructions.

Call Your Doctor if You:

- Have a temperature of 100.4 °F (38 °C) or higher with or without chills
- Have redness, swelling, peeling, scaling, cracking, crusting, tingling, oozing, or drainage that becomes unbearable or lasts for more than 1 week

- Have mild flu-like symptoms that get worse or don't go away
- Have worsening or unrelieved pain
- Develop blisters, open sores, scaling, or crusting on the treated area
- Have any questions or unexpected problems