

PHOTOTHERAPY

PATIENT INFORMATION & INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT IS PHOTOTHERAPY?

Phototherapy/photochemotherapy is a treatment program for various skin diseases which are photoresponsive, such as: alopecia, psoriasis, vitiligo, mycosis fungoides, parapsoriasis, and pityriasis rosea. Photochemotherapy has been nicknamed PUVA therapy, “P” standing for psoralens, and the UVA is the spectrum of ultraviolet light that is found in the photo-therapy unit. UVB is a spectrum of ultraviolet light that is another option for treatment. UVB is used without psoralens.

Both of these wavelengths are in natural sunlight. UVB is the component that will cause a sunburn. UVB alone can improve some skin conditions, such as psoriasis. UVA, without psoralens, is of minimal clinical value. Although ultraviolet light is a normal component of sunlight, special “phototherapy” lights have been made to generate either UVB or UVA. The treatments you are scheduled to receive use one of these light sources.

Phototherapy started in 1974 by a large number of centers throughout the United States. It is now used in at least six centers in Utah. The treatment is not a cure, it is a control. The purpose of the treatment is to clear the disease sufficient for the patient to maintain a normal lifestyle.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

- Flare of disease. Some individuals may experience a flare of their disease during the initial treatment period. This includes increased redness, scaling, itching, and skin irritability. Should any of these problems not resolve, therapy would be discontinued.
- The oral psoralen medication has been used since 1940 in the treatment of skin diseases. It has been found to be a safe medication with few side effects.
 - Occasional nausea (in approximately 10% of patients). This may be partially controlled by taking pills with food.
 - An exaggerated sunburn. The medication stays in the skin for up to 24 hours after it has been taken; therefore, it is important to avoid sun exposure after taking the pills by the use of physical protection with clothing and sunscreens.
 - The eyes will be more sensitive to light during treatment days. For this reason, special plastic goggles must be worn during the treatment. For 24 hours after treatment, glasses that screen 100% of the ultraviolet light must be worn when outdoors during sunlight hours.
- Skin cancer and other changes caused by sunlight may result from this treatment. These other skin changes include: redness, tanning, itching, cold sores, enhanced skin aging, benign freckling, and burning or tingling sensations.
- 4. Headaches and dizziness.

COMMERCIAL TANNING BEDS

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PROTOCOL

Find a salon with the Wolff bed system and ask the salon operator for the bed with the most UVB (the best they will find is usually around 5%).

Start tanning duration based on skin type:

- 1 minute for type one fitzpatrick
- 2 minutes for type two fitzpatrick
- 3 minutes for type three fitzpatrick, etc.

With each session, you should go up by 1-2 minutes per session up to the point where you are getting pink but not burning, then maintain that number of minutes. Most patients don't go beyond 20 minutes. If a tanning burn occurs, you should either reduce the number of minutes back to the duration where you did not burn, then hold at that number of minutes for 1 or 2 sessions.

You should tan 5-7 times per week. The best results in our study were in people who made it at least 5 times.

Please understand the importance of protection of eyes with goggles, genitals with undergarments, and face (if indicated) with a bag or towel.

If you must take a break in tanning, call your physician to determine how to adjust your tanning times.

CAUTION

Patients should NEVER take the medication psoralen when using commercial tanning beds. DEATHS have been reported in patients who took psoralen and went to a commercial tanning bed.

REFERENCE

Christopher Carlin, Kristina P. Callis, and Gerald G. Krueger. Efficacy of acitretin and commercial tanning bed therapy for psoriasis. Arch Dermatol 2003 Apr; 139(4):436-442.

OTHER RESOURCES

We work hard to publish only best patient education and comprehensive resources. We want to be your trusted source of all skin information. You will find additional educational information by scanning the following QR codes.

*Our Patient
Education Blog*



*Our Monthly
Newsletter*



*Our Educational
Youtube Videos*

