



St John's Institute of Dermatology

UVA1 phototherapy

Treating your skin condition

Your doctor has referred you to the Dowling Day Treatment Centre for a course of UVA1 phototherapy for your skin condition. This leaflet explains this treatment in detail, including its risks, benefits and alternatives. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is ultraviolet radiation (UVR)?

Ultraviolet radiation (UVR) is produced by the sun. Although it can't be seen, it is an important part of sunlight and is divided into UVA, UVB and UVC.

UVA rays go deeper into the skin than the other types of UVR, and cause it to tan. UVA is made up of UVA1 and UVA2. UVA1 is the type of UVA which goes deepest of all into the skin.

What can UVA1 phototherapy treat?

UVA1 phototherapy is used to treat skin diseases where the skin thickens, including scleroderma and morphea. It is also sometimes used in the treatment of other skin diseases (including atopic dermatitis, chronic urticaria and polymorphic light eruption).

What does the treatment involve?

The treatment is given in the Dowling Day Unit by specially trained nurses. You will need to undress and lie down on a flat bed. Above you are fluorescent lights which produce UVA1 rays.

Why should you have UVA1 phototherapy?

This treatment is the most suitable treatment for your skin condition. It is often recommended if you have tried ointments and creams without success and before trying tablet medication. Most patients find their skin has improved after about 30 treatments and remains clear for three to four months or sometimes longer, though the successfulness of the treatment varies from one patient to another and from one skin disease to another.

Are there any other types of phototherapy?

The other phototherapy treatments are PUVA and narrowband UVB. The choice of phototherapy treatment depends upon what the problem is with your skin.

Asking for your consent

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves.

If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

Before and during your treatment

Reduce exposure to the sun's rays to minimise the risk of sunburn

Cover up with long sleeved clothes particularly on sunny days. You may also wear a hat. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of a least 20 that protects against UVA and UVB rays and re-apply it regularly. Please do not sunbathe or use a sunbed during the whole course of your treatment.

Let us know if you have a haircut or, for any other reason, any areas of skin become newly exposed during the course of treatment.

On the day of your treatment

Do not wear perfumes, deodorants, aftershave lotions or other cosmetic products before your treatment. Some of these contain substances which make your skin more sensitive to light. This can cause patchy discolouration of the skin and take some months to fade. You can use them after each treatment. For the same reason please let us know if you have started any new medications or creams whilst having treatment as some can make your skin more sensitive to light.

On treatment days please do not apply any creams or ointments to your skin before you go in the machine apart from an appropriate moisturiser. We suggest that you moisturise beforehand as this helps your skin to absorb the ultraviolet light and use a water based moisturiser such as Diprobase[®], Aveeno[®] or E45 cream. Do not use oily creams as these could cause burning and prevent the UVA1 from being absorbed. If you are not sure which creams you can use please ask a member of the day unit staff.

Arriving for your treatment

Let the nursing staff know you have arrived. At your first visit you will need to have a light test, which allows us to see your skin's tolerance to UVA1. We need this to calculate your safe starting dose. You will need to come back 24 hours afterwards so we can examine the site where you had the light test. We will then be able to start your treatment.

We usually ask that you remove all your clothing, although you can keep your underwear on if this area of skin is not affected. Men must either wear dark underwear or cover their genitalia whilst in the booth. If you wear underwear, please make sure it covers the same area on each visit. If an area of skin that has previously been covered is exposed to the UVA1 treatment, it may burn.

What happens during treatment?

The nurse will call you from the waiting room when a machine is available for your treatment. He/she will examine your skin on each visit and ask you some questions before you enter the machine. We will give you goggles to protect your eyes, which you must wear at all times during your treatment. We will show you how to lie down in the machine in the correct position to make sure that all your skin is exposed evenly each time.

You will be in the UVA1 machine for up to 45 minutes. We closely monitor the amount of UVA1 you receive and we will increase the dose with each treatment as long as you have tolerated the previous treatment. The machine is quite bright and you may feel warm if you need to stay in the booth for a long time. You can let the nursing staff know if it feels uncomfortable.

How often will you need to have this treatment?

This depends on your skin condition and we generally give treatments 3-5 times a week for 10-12 weeks. We do our best to keep to your appointment time, but occasionally there may be a short queue. Please ask one of the nurses if you are concerned about your waiting time. You may have up to 50 treatments.

What are the risks with UVA1 phototherapy?

Your doctor or nurse will discuss the possible complications of this treatment with you in more detail, but you need to be aware of the following:

- Your skin can occasionally get itchy and dry and temporarily worsen.
- Increased pigmentation. This will fade but takes longer to do this if you have darker skin.
- Redness and burning of the skin. You may notice mild redness of the skin approximately four hours after treatment that can last up to a day. Sometimes this persists for up to 48 hours and can be associated with tingling. If the redness gets painful or hot this can be treated appropriately by your dermatologist.
- Polymorphic light eruption (prickly heat). This is reported to affect approximately one in three people. If it occurs, treatment will be stopped for five days until the rash clears.
- Cold sores. This may affect one in 30 people. Tell your nurse if you notice early signs of tingling or a painful bump developing on your lip. If you have a history of cold sores we will apply sunblock to lips.
- Deterioration of the disease being treated. This may occur instead of improvement and your doctor will advise you of the risk of this happening.
- Gradual ageing of the skin. UVA1 may very rarely cause premature ageing of the skin. This is rare even with extremely high numbers of treatments.

Are there any follow-up appointments?

Yes, you will be able to book your UVA1 appointments in advance. Generally you will have a set time slot through the course of treatment. Please remember to keep all your appointments and let us know if you cannot attend for any reason. You will usually have a follow-up appointment six months after your treatment with a doctor, or sooner if you are having problems.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, please contact the Dowling Day Unit **t:** 020 7188 6290.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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