

Patient Information

Narrow-Band UVB Phototherapy Treatment

Dermatology Department

What is UVB treatment?

UVB is a form of ultraviolet light, produced from UV fluorescent tubes, that is beneficial in the treatment of a wide variety of skin disorders. We use narrow-band UVB, which has been shown to be a safe and effective treatment for a variety of skin disorders. It is now the most widely used phototherapy in the UK.

How is UVB treatment given?

A qualified phototherapist will always supervise your treatment. UVB treatment is administered three times a week (for example on a Monday, Wednesday and a Friday). Usually approximately 18-24 treatments are required for clearance of your skin condition although some disorders may take longer to clear than others.

Before treatment is commenced the phototherapy nurse may like to establish a safe starting dose for you. This is called an MED test and it will measure your tolerance to UVB light (in some circumstances an MED test is not necessary). The MED test is applied to the lower back on the first day, and is read 24 hours later. The result is used to calculate your start dose. At each subsequent treatment, the dose will be increased, depending on how your skin has responded to the previous treatment.

When you arrive for treatment you will need to undress and put on UV protective goggles and a face visor. Men will need to wear protection on their genitals. The phototherapist will check and ask you about your skin, and will then calculate your dose for that treatment. You will then enter the phototherapy cabinet and the nurse will tell you how long the treatment will take.

Ideally, there should be no redness of the skin after treatment and no discomfort. If at any time you feel that the UV dose you have been given has caused discomfort or has caused a marked, persisting skin redness (like mild sunburn), you must let the phototherapist know so that further increments can be adjusted appropriately.

Possible side effects of UVB

Most people who have UVB treatment suffer no side effects, but if side effects do occur they are usually mild and virtually never permanent. Most side effects can be treated with creams or will disappear of their own accord within a few days. Some of the side effects that can occur are:-

Your skin may become red, similar to the redness caused by sunburn. Occasionally the dose of light that you receive will exceed your skin's tolerance and you may develop a more prolonged redness, i.e. a burn. Rarely blistering of the skin may occur. If this happens, treatment will be suspended until the skin settles down again. We may prescribe an alternative treatment to alleviate the symptoms of a burn.

Some patients experience a prickling sensation of the skin following UVB. This can occur even on non-treatment days and may even be severe enough to discontinue treatment.

There will be an increased tendency for your skin to be dry following UVB. It is recommended that you use a moisturiser frequently during your UVB course.

Cold sores can develop on the lips during treatment if the face is exposed to the UVB light. If you are prone to developing cold sores inform the phototherapist who will advise the use of a face visor or a sunscreen cream will be applied to your lips before you go in the cabinet.

Long- term use of UVB may accelerate the ageing process of the skin, and also increase the chance of certain skin cancers in later life, although there is no evidence of this for UVB at the current time.

If you have accumulated 500 treatments during your lifetime then the risks and benefits of the treatment will be re-assessed and you may be asked to attend for an annual skin cancer check.

Do's and don'ts whilst having UVB

You must avoid sun beds and sunbathing during the course of your treatment.

Protective goggles should always be worn in the cabinet to protect your eyes from UVB light. A face visor is also recommended unless there is significant involvement of the face.

Avoid wearing any perfume, deodorant or make-up when you attend for treatment, as your skin may become sensitive to the UV light.

Men must shield their genital area with a sock, jock strap or underpants whilst in the cabinet.

Inform the phototherapy nurse if you start any new medication, over-the-counter tablets (such as vitamin supplements and especially herbal preparations), creams or ointments once you have started your course of UVB. Be aware that some medications that you may have in your bathroom cabinet (such as simple headache tablets) may cause sensitivity to UV light.

Avoid having your hair cut or waxed if possible during your course of treatment. If you do have haircut, inform the phototherapist so that sun block can be applied to previously unexposed skin.

Ensure that you stand in the centre of the cabinet as you have been shown.

If any item of clothing is worn in the cabinet, it should be used for each of your treatments, ensuring that the same item of clothing is always worn. It is important that you develop a routine in the cabinet, and always repeat it when you come in for treatment. Changing your pattern of behaviour in the cabinet may lead to a burn if previously unexposed skin is subsequently exposed.

How to contact us:

The telephone number of the St Woolos Phototherapy Unit is: 01633 234963 and the Ysbwty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) unit is: 01443 802368, both during working hours.

The Psoriasis Direct number is: 01633 656362

Any urgent enquiries can be dealt with by telephoning the Dermatology Ward on: 01633 234646.

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