Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Photodynamic Therapy

This information will help you get ready for photodynamic therapy (PDT).

About Photodynamic Therapy

Photodynamic therapy (PDT) is a treatment for skin lesions called actinic keratosis. Lesions are skin growths that don't look like the skin around them. Actinic keratosis are early skin cancers. PDT is also used to treat some skin cancers on the surface of the skin, also known as superficial skin cancers.

PDT has 2 steps:

1. A medication is put on the treatment area that makes it very sensitive to light. You must wait _____ hours for the medication to be absorbed.
2. Your healthcare provider will shine a red or blue light on the area. The light reacts with the medication. It destroys the actinic keratosis or skin cancer.

Preparing for Your Treatment

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- Are allergic to soy.
- Take any medications. You may have to stop taking some of your medications because they may change the way PDT works. Tell your healthcare provider if you take any of the following:
  - Medications that require a prescription.
  - Medications that don't require a prescription (over-the-counter medications).
  - Retinoids (compounds found in eye creams, serums, and moisturizers).

    - Herbal remedies.
    - Vitamins.
    - Dietary supplements.
    - Antibiotics you take now, or if you recently took an antibiotic.
- Have a history of oral or genital herpes. This can include cold sores, fever blisters, or shingles (viral infection that causes a rash) 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

- On the day of your treatment, don't apply creams, lotions, or makeup on the area being treated.
- Don't shave the area being treated the day of your treatment.
- If you have a history of herpes, take your Valtrex® prescription before your treatment, as instructed by your healthcare provider.
- 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 _____ hours.

During your treatment

- Your healthcare provider will apply acetone or alcohol to remove any oils and get the treatment area ready.
- Your healthcare provider will put the medication on the treatment area. The medication will make your skin sensitive to sunlight. They will tell you how long it will take for the medication to be absorbed. The nurse may stay in the room with you for the entire procedure.
- A red or 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.
    - Depending on the color of light used, your treatment time can vary.
- During the light treatment, you may have some discomfort. It may feel like a stinging, prickling, or burning sensation, similar to a sunburn. A fan will be provided for you to relieve any discomfort. The feeling usually goes away after treatment but may take up to 48 hours (2 days) to go away completely.

After Your Treatment

Everyone responds differently to this treatment. For 1 to 2 weeks, 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 such as fever, chills (feeling cold and

shivering), or body aches. If you have any flu-like symptoms, call your healthcare provider.

Caring for yourself at home

Follow the guidelines below to help manage side effects.

- Apply a cool compress (such as a cold cloth or ice pack) to the treated area a few times a day for the first 24 hours (1 day). To do this:
  1. Take a clean washcloth and dip it into room temperature or cool water.
  2. Then, wring it out and gently apply it to the treated area.
  3. When the cool sensation goes away, soak the cloth again, and repeat these steps.
- 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.
  - Storing your moisturizer in the refrigerator can increase the cooling effect.
- If you have discomfort after your treatment, take an over-the-counter medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), or aspirin. You may be allergic to these medications, or can't take them due to a medical condition. If so, talk with your healthcare provider about which medication to take instead.
- You can also take an antihistamine (such as Benadryl ®) to help with any itchiness or swelling. Talk with your healthcare provider before taking this.
- For 48 hours after your treatment, don't expose the treated area to bright light. This includes avoiding:
  - Direct sunlight.
  - Indirect sunlight.
  - Very bright indoor lights (such as spotlights, photocopy machines, and

medical exam lights). Normal house lighting is OK.
    - Blue light. Don't sit very close to a bright computer or television screen.
- 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 (2 days), 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 such as Aquaphor®, Vaseline®, or Cetaphil®.
- Return to the office for your follow-up appointment as instructed by your healthcare provider.

Call Your Healthcare Provider if You:

- Have a fever 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 2 weeks.
- Have mild flu-like symptoms that get worse or don't go away.
- Have worsening pain, or pain that won't go away.
- Develop blisters, open sores, scaling, or crusting on the treated area.
- Have any questions or unexpected problems.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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