

WHAT IS PUVA?

PUVA stands for oral Psoralens combined with exposure to a type of phototherapy known as ultraviolet A (UVA). The psoralen part of the PUVA is an oral pill that is taken one hour before the light treatment. PUVA is an effective therapy for psoriasis and many other types of skin problems.

Although ultraviolet light is a normal component of sunlight, special phototherapy lights have been created to isolate the UVA component for optimum results. The treatments themselves last anywhere from 30 seconds to two minutes initially and then slowly increase in time. Normally patients receive these treatments two times per week. The capsules are taken one hour before the light treatment starts. The number of capsules taken is based on your weight and I will inform you about correct dose for you. The light treatment is not effective without capsules, so be sure to take them one hour before.

Because PUVA therapy sensitizes your skin to the sun, you should avoid direct exposure to sun light on the day that you receive treatment. In addition your eyes may be more sensitive to sunlight on the day of treatment. For this reasons it is important to wear the special glasses each day that you take the pills. It will be necessary to have your eyes checked before or shortly after starting treatment.

PUVA is a very safe and effective treatment for skin problems including psoriasis. The most common side effect is the occasional stomach upset, which occurs when the pill is taken. This can be corrected by taking your pills with food or milk. In addition you will also develop a suntan which normally fades after treatment has stopped.

Since the pill taken with the PUVA treatment sensitizes your skin to ultraviolet A sunlight, another side effect which may develop is a sunburn type of reaction. This occurs as a painful red sunburn on any part of your body that is exposed to the PUVA light. Rarely a severe type of sunburn with blisters could develop in the treated areas. Remember that your skin is overly sensitive to natural sun light on the days you take the pills so that without any protection natural sun exposure could also produce a sunburn.

There may be a slightly increased incidence of skin cancer in fair skinned patients who take PUVA for a long period of time (years). For this reason it will be necessary to monitor your skin periodically. If any new growths would develop, please point them out to me.

PUVA is a control for most skin problems and not a cure. Therefore, you may continue this treatment after your condition has cleared up in order to keep it under control. Each patient requires individualized treatment and I will determine what is the best approach for your problem.