

Photodynamic Therapy

This information will help you prepare for photodynamic therapy (PDT) in the dermatology clinic.

About Photodynamic Therapy

Photodynamic therapy (PDT) can treat precancerous skin lesions called actinic keratoses and some early skin cancers.

PDT is a 2-step process:

1. A medication will be put on the treatment area to make the precancerous or cancerous skin cells sensitive to light. You must wait for the medication to be absorbed and the light sensitivity to develop. Depending on the body site and your sensitivity to the treatment, this will typically range from 1 to 3 hours.
2. The treated area will be exposed to blue or red light. The light reacts with the medication and destroys the actinic keratoses or skin cancer.

During treatment, you may feel warmth, tingling, or heat. After treatment, the area is washed, and a thick, white sunscreen may be applied.

Preparing for Your Treatment

Tell your doctor or nurse if you take any medications. You may have to stop taking some medications because they may change the way PDT works.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you:

- ✓ take prescription and over-the-counter medication, retinoids (Vitamin A-related medicines/products), herbal or dietary supplements, or vitamins
- ✓ currently have a cold sore or shingles - or have cold sores or shingles that keep coming back
- ✓ are allergic to 5-aminolevulinic acid (ALA) or have other allergies
- ✓ are pregnant or plan to become pregnant
- ✓ are sensitive to light or the sun or have porphyria (rare disorder making skin sensitive to sun)

Stop smoking at least a few days before the procedure and do not smoke for 1-2 weeks after treatment. Smoking slows wound healing.

The Day of Your Treatment

- Don't use creams, lotions, or makeup on the treatment area.
- Bring something to protect the treatment area when you leave.
 - 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 several hours. The exact amount of time will depend on your specific treatment plan.

More About PDT

- Photodynamic therapy (PDT) is a treatment that uses a medication called a photosensitizer or photosensitizing agent, and a particular type of light.
- When photosensitizers are exposed to a specific light wavelength, they produce an activated form of oxygen that kills nearby cells.
- In addition to directly killing cancer cells, PDT appears to shrink or destroy tumors in other ways. For example, it may activate the immune system to attack the tumor cells.
- Light sources include blue light, fluorescent light tubes, and red, light-emitting diodes (LEDs) but may also include laser light, intense pulsed light, and many other visible lights (including natural sunlight).
- PDT is sometimes called blue light therapy, as the most frequently performed PDT is ALA/PDT with blue light.
- Most people have no complications from PDT. Dryness and a mild sunburn-like reaction in the treated area are not unusual. Other possible, but uncommon, side effects include skin discoloration, swelling, and infection. People with darker skin types may have more discoloration after treatment. PDT does not usually leave any scars.

After Treatment

- The photosensitizer most commonly used in dermatology can make the skin temporarily sensitive to light for approximately 48 hours after treatment. Patients are advised to avoid direct sunlight for at least 48 hours. Wear long sleeves, sunglasses, etc. to keep treated areas covered.
- When you leave after treatment, you will receive instructions on how to take care of the treated areas and when you should call the doctor.
- Keep all your follow-up appointments.