

Photodynamic Therapy – Traditional Protocol

Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) is a safe, non-invasive procedure to treat pre-cancerous lesions such as Actinic Keratosis, with the added cosmetic benefit of reducing brown spots and smoothing skin texture.

The treatment is performed with a topical photosensitizing solution called Levulan, which is activated with a light source. Levulan (ALA) is a naturally occurring substance found throughout the body. Once applied, Levulan is naturally attracted and absorbed by fast growing abnormal cells. After allowing the Levulan to incubate and fully absorb into the target cells, it is activated by a light source that emits blue, visible light. This causes the skin to produce oxygen radicals that will destroy these target cells. This treatment will help remove pre-cancerous spots called Actinic Keratoses, sun damage and blotchy pigmentation.

Usually a series of 1-2 treatments is required to get adequate clearance of the Actinic Keratoses.

Prior to Treatment

Please be prepared to spend a minimum of 2-3 hours with us for your visit, depending on the area being treated. Please bring a large hat to wear when you leave.

What to Expect During Treatment

- First, we will prep your skin with a cleansing solution. Then, we will apply the Levulan and have it “incubate” on the skin for 1-2 hours.
- During the incubation period, you may experience slight stinging and/or itching
- After the incubation, you will sit under the blue light for 16 minutes.
- The treatment itself may feel like you are getting a sunburn. Patients report feeling heat, burning and stinging. Most patients find using a fan helps the discomfort and that it is usually mild to moderate. However, some patients can have more intense discomfort and may require a pause in their treatment.

Post Care Instructions

You will need to stay out of the sun and any intense, bright visible light, such as fluorescent or flood lights, for 48 hours following your treatment. That means no driving, walking, or being outside for even a few minutes at a time. Be sure to use a good sun block in case the sun reaches your skin for even a moment.

Keep the treated area clean so there is not a risk for infection.

Apply moisturizer as often as needed. You may also apply Aquaphor 2 times per day as needed.

Take pain medication as needed (Tylenol, Advil).

Use ice packs as necessary to keep down the swelling and to reduce pain. If treating the face, sleep elevated to help reduce swelling.

What to Expect Post Treatment

Depending on the length of Levulan incubation, you will have a sunburn-like effect that can last for up to 5-7 days. This can mean anything from being light pink to a more swollen, red, and itchy appearance. Some patients may have a stronger response to PDT, and experience a more severe sunburn-like effect.

Peeling may begin on day 3 or 4. ****Make sure you do not pick at your skin! ****

Crusting, scabbing, and/or oozing may occur where there was more prominent sun damage and/or Actinic Keratosis. These symptoms are normal after PDT treatment, but we ask you to call if you have any concerns.

After Treatment Skin Care

All of your skin care products should be non-irritating and non-clogging until your skin is no longer peeling or flaking. Please do not use any scrubs, toners, glycolic acid, retinoid (Retin-A, retinol), or bleaching creams, (hydroquinone) until your skin has healed (at least 1 week).

You may apply makeup as soon as you feel comfortable and once any crusting has peeled.

Proper and frequent application of sunscreen is very important. Reapply your sunscreen every 2 hours. If direct sun exposure is necessary, wear a hat and clothing that covers the treated area.

To clean the treatment site, gently wash with your fingertips using a mild soap (examples: CeraVe, Cetaphil, Neutrogena, Dove).

If you have any questions or concerns, please call our office at 415.887.9758