

PhotoDynamic Therapy for Actinic Keratosis

What is PhotoDynamic Therapy?

PhotoDynamic Therapy™ (PDT) is a special treatment performed with a topical photosensitizing agent called Aminolevulinic Acid or ALA activated with the blue light. ALA is a naturally occurring photosensitizing compound. It has been approved by the FDA to treat pre-cancerous skin lesions called actinic keratosis. It is applied to the skin and subsequently “activated” by specific wavelengths of light. This process of activating ALA with light is termed photodynamic therapy. The purpose is to remove sun damaged pre-cancerous zones and cells.

How is the procedure performed? The skin is cleaned and prepped with acetone. ALA is then applied and the patient rests for about one to two hours to allow for the chemical to penetrate the skin. The ALA is then activated with a blue light for 16 minutes and 40 seconds.

Is it painful? Most patients complain of a mild burning or stinging sensation.

How much improvement can I expect? Patients generally see marked improvement with 1-2 treatments. This treatment can also treat subclinical lesions and help prevent future precancerous and cancerous lesions. Repeat treatments may be needed every few months to years.

What are the side effects? Sun must be avoided for 48 hours and sunscreen with zinc oxide and a hat must be worn during the healing process. Most patients have some mild redness and peeling similar to a sunburn, which resolves within 7 to 10 days. Rarely, patients have an exuberant response to PDT™ and experience marked redness and pain of their skin. If this happens, notify our office for a prescription cream to counteract the redness and discomfort immediately. We always are available after hours by cell phone.

Patient Pre-Treatment Instructions

Plan on being in the office for one to three hours depending on the area treated.

Please bring a snack and jacket if needed.

Please do not wear makeup if your face is being treated.

Bring a wide brimmed hat to wear home.

Discuss if you should stop any topical medications before procedure.

Notify our staff before treatment if you have a history of cold sores.

Patient Post-Treatment Instructions

DO NOT GET IN THE SUN FOR 48 HOURS.

Go outdoors before 7:00am or after 7:00pm for the first 48 hours.

Cleanse with a mild cleanser and apply moisturizer, Aquaphor healing ointment or Vaseline, as often as needed.

Apply a sunscreen with at least SPF 30 with zinc and/or titanium dioxide.

Avoid sitting by windows or reflective surfaces.

You may apply over the counter hydrocortisone cream for mild redness, burning or itching. **If you experience severe pain, redness or swelling, contact us immediately for stronger prescription cream or other medication.**

Depending on the area treated, wear a wide brimmed hat, tight weave clothing and sunscreen when going out for at least the week following treatment.

You may take over the counter pain medications, if needed.

