DERMATOLOGY
& Skin Health

What is Photodynamic Therapy?

Photodynamic therapy (PDT) is a treatment that involves applying a photosensitizing topical solution to the skin followed by exposure to a specific wavelength of light to selectively target pre-skin cancers and sun damage.

What Can it Help?

PDT can help clear the skin of actinic keratoses (AKs). AKs are red, rough, scaly growths in sun-exposed areas – mainly the face, chest, arms, and hands. AKs are premalignant, meaning that over time, some can develop into squamous cell cancers.

The Benefits of PDT Treatment:

- Recovery begins right after your treatment.
- Levulan® PDT treatment targets and destroys only the damaged or precancerous cells and even some early cancers.
- The entire area is treated so that non-visible lesions are also treated.
- The majority of patients treated felt they had good to excellent results, and many patients experience high clearance for up to one year.
- Little downtime and no reports of scarring to date.
- Based on two medical studies, the majority of patients treated with Levulan® PDT rated the cosmetic response as good to excellent.
- Typically, two treatments are required, one month apart.
- Treatment is reimbursed by Medicare and many other insurance companies.

What Can I Expect Before, During, and After the Treatment?

Your skin will be cleansed thoroughly. Upon cleansing the skin, the nurse will apply Levulan® Kerastick® (aminolevulinic acid) – a clear liquid – to the area of the skin that is being treated. This will incubate, or be absorbed for one to three hours, depending on the area being treated. It is also common that the nurse will pretreat the skin with Tazorac cream one week prior to your scheduled PDT appointment.

The second part of your treatment involves illuminating your treated lesions with the BLU-U® blue light. Your treatment with the BLU-U® will take 16 minutes and 40 seconds. Protective eyewear will be worn during the BLU-U® treatment.

Occasionally you will feel some burning discomfort during the treatment. If this is the case, a fan is readily available for use to decrease this stinging sensation.

After the treatment the skin involved will be extremely light sensitive for 48 hours until the medication is completely metabolized. You must avoid exposing the treated lesions to sunlight and even close exposure to bright indoor light. During this time, wear protective clothing such as a wide-brimmed hat to protect the skin. Remember that the sun's rays penetrate through window glass and even high SPF sunblock is not adequate protection during the first 48 hours.

Most of the time some redness, irritation, mild swelling, and mild peeling will occur during the first two to three days. Full recovery from PDT takes about one to two weeks. The worse your skin looks after the treatment, the better the results will be because the destruction of precancerous lesions (AKs) is what causes the irritation to the area. If you have a large number of pre-skin cancers, more of the drug will be absorbed and there will be a stronger reaction. You MUST apply moisturizers and cool compresses as needed.

Always remember to use sunscreen and wear sun protective clothing on a daily basis to shield your skin from the sun's damaging UV rays to prevent the formation of more AKs.

Who Should Not Have PDT?

Patients who have cutaneous photosensitivity at wavelengths 400-450nm, porphyria, or known allergies to porphyrins should not have PDT.