

Department of Dermatology Queens Hospital, Burton on Trent

Metvix photodynamic therapy

What is Photodynamic therapy (PDT)?

PDT is a new and successful method of treating certain skin growths including early localised skin cancers and pre-cancers (all of which we will simply call 'lesions' in this leaflet). The lesions most often treated by this method are actinic (sunshine) keratoses and rodent ulcers. The treatment consists of applying a special cream (containing the ingredient methylaminolaevulinate or MAL, known as Metvix) to the lesion and 3 hours later shining a pure red light on it. The light alone is harmless as is the cream. Only where the two are combined will they treat the abnormal area of your skin.

Why is PDT better than other treatments?

- . Healing is usually rapid since there is relatively little damage to the healthy cells.
- . The cosmetic result is very good with minimal scarring.
- . PDT can be repeated if necessary and does not prevent you from receiving any of the other treatment options in the future.

Are there any drawbacks to PDT?

There are no long term side effects from the treatment, but there are a few minor drawbacks:

- . The cream needs to be left on for a full 3 hours to allow it to soak in as deeply as possible.
- . There may be a slight discomfort, usually described as a stinging, prickling or burning sensation, during and after treatment. We have several ways of reducing this sensation and the specific technique proposed will be explained to you. We can give you an injection of local anaesthetic to numb the area just before treatment if necessary.

In order to get the best result, it is recommended that the treatment is repeated one week from your first treatment but this is usually all the treatment required.

What will happen to me when I attend for my treatment?

- Cream application morning

- . Any scale or crusts will be removed and the surface overlying the lesion roughened to help the cream penetrate. You may have been asked by your doctor to apply a type of Vaseline for a few days before you attend to help lift this crust.
- . For rodent ulcers we also gently remove exposed growth material, this helps the cream to soak in deeply.
- . We will then apply the special photosensitising cream, Metvix, and place a dressing over this to keep ordinary light out. It is essential that you do not disturb this dressing.
- . We will give you a time to return to the treatment room in the afternoon. We need to leave the cream on for a full 3 hours normally. During this time you may stay at the hospital or you may return home and come back to the hospital later.

Light application (3 hours later)

- . When you return we will ask you to sit or lie down, whichever is more comfortable.
- . We will take off the dressing and remove the cream remaining on the surface of the lesion.
- . We may give you, if necessary, a local anaesthetic to numb the area.
- . We will shine a red light onto the lesion. This will have no effect on you except where the cream has been applied.
- . If the treatment is near the eyes they will be shielded from the light.
- . The light part of the treatment takes around 15 minutes to ensure the best result. There may be a tingling feeling during the treatment. This tells us that the therapy is working, but if it becomes too uncomfortable let us know and we can relieve this for you with local anaesthetic.
- . At the end of the treatment we will put a dressing over the treated area.

What do I do when I return home?

- . You must keep the dressing on until the following evening at least (preferably 48 hours). This is to avoid light getting to the treated area.
- . There should be little or no pain with discomfort lasting only a few days at most.

- . After the dressing has been removed the treated area will probably crust over. This is normal and healing takes place under this crust. It is important not to disturb or pick it since the crust will naturally fall off when the area underneath has healed in a few weeks.
- . In some cases the treated area may appear pink, swell or ooze slightly. These are also normal and just signify a stronger treatment action. This will normally settle down within a few days.
- . After the first 24-48 hours you can wash, bathe or shower as usual. Do not rub the treated area but gently dab it dry. It is best to avoid swimming until the area is finally healed.

What's next?

You should receive a time to come one week later to receive the second part of this treatment 'cycle'. The same routine as described above is followed on this date

Contacting the hospital

If you would like further advice about this treatment contact:
Helen Jowett, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Dermatology on:

01283 566333 Bleep No. 586

If you require further information please contact the Dermatology secretaries
01283 566333 Ext 4009, 4061 or 4197

This document is available in alternative languages, and is also available in a version more suitable for persons with visual impairment

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