

Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) for Actinic Keratoses

What is an Actinic Keratosis?

An actinic keratosis is a scaly or crusty bump that forms on the skin surface. They range in size from a small pinhead spot to over an inch across. They may be light or dark, tan, pink, red, a combination of these, or the same color as your skin.

Why is it dangerous?

Actinic keratoses can be the first step in the development of skin cancer, and, therefore, is a precursor of cancer or a "precancer". It is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of active lesions, which are redder and more sensitive than the rest will take the next step and progress to squamous cell carcinoma.

What is PDT?

A photosensitizing agent, aminolevulanic acid (ALA), is applied to the skin, and allows the skin to be more receptive to the light treatment. ALA needs to soak into the skin after application which is typically 1 hour. This is followed by 20 minutes of exposure to blue light. This process generates free oxygen radicals which essentially destroy the abnormal cells. PDT is considered an optimal treatment option for patients with many actinic keratoses and is often shorter in duration and easier than many topical creams. Another advantage of PDT is the excellent cosmetic outcome of this treatment. PDT has minimal scar formation when compared with other modalities of treatment such as surgery, cryotherapy, chemotherapy, or radiotherapy.

Side effects of PDT include stinging and/or burning, itching, redness, crusting, and swelling. All of these are reported to be mild or moderate in severity and rarely require pain medication. Redness is experienced by virtually all patients after treatment, typically resolving 1 week after light treatment.

Treatment Costs and Insurance Considerations

PDT is a very effective and medically necessary treatment that most insurance plans will cover.

Some insurance plans (but not traditional Medicare) occasionally deny coverage even after we check your coverage prior. For any PDT denials, we will discount to our Self Pay price.

Anthem National Accounts and Blue Cross/Blue Shield Out-of-State plans have denied coverage on just a few claims of many hundreds we have submitted. Blue Shield of California has denied some treatments as "experimental"; these patients will be asked to pay in advance, but we will submit the insurance claim and reimburse the patient for any insurance payment. No other commercial insurance plans (e.g., Aetna, Cigna, United Healthcare, etc) have denied our PDT claims to date.

Our PDT Coordinator will help you with the specifics of your insurance and payment options, or help coordinate alternative treatment options upon request.

The doctors highly recommend a follow up visit 3 days post light treatment to ensure proper healing and 2 months afterwards to check on your progress and response to treatment. These are regular office visits, not included in the cost of the treatment itself.



Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) Home Care Instructions

Day of the Treatment

- Please cleanse the skin to be treated just prior to arrival. Remove all sunscreen, moisturizers, lotion and make-up.
- Bring cover up clothing to protect the treated area. These may include: a broad brimmed hat, bandana or scarf, long-sleeved shirt, and/or gloves.
- Bring a book or magazine to read. You will be waiting for approximately 1 hour (or as designated by your physician) while the aminolevulanic acid is absorbed into your skin. You cannot go outside into the sun during this time.
- If you have a history of Cold Sores/Fever Blisters, you should be on prophylactic medication. Discuss with your PDT provider in advance.
- **Pain Control:** This procedure can be uncomfortable. We do provide Tylenol; however, it has been our experience that it may not be enough. To reduce discomfort, we offer Valium or Xanax and/or Percocet at the time of your procedure. If you choose to take these medications, you must have a trusted friend or family member come up into the office to provide you with assistance down to the vehicle, and drive you home. Travelling home alone with Uber, Lyft, Taxi, or similar service is not an acceptable plan. Under no circumstance will we dispense these medications without a **designated driver**.

After the Treatment

- Go straight home and stay indoors. Do not stop to run errands or go to the mall.
- Take a cool shower and use a mild soap to remove any residual photosensitizer.
- **You must remain indoors and avoid light exposure for at least 36 hours.** Avoid fluorescent lighting and even avoid sunlight through windows. You may go outside after complete sunset.
- If you have an emergency and must go outdoors into sunlight, wear a broad brimmed hat or other appropriate protective clothing over all treated areas.
- If you have discomfort, begin applying ice packs. It will help keep the area cool and reduce swelling.
- Swelling will be most evident around the eyes and is usually more prominent in the morning.
- Take pain medication such as Motrin, Advil, or Tylenol as needed.
- For men receiving face treatment, please shave the morning of the procedure. Post procedure, please avoid shaving for at least 5 days. If you must shave, use an electric razor. It may still irritate the skin but not as much as blade razors.

Days 2-7

- Your skin will feel dry and tight and may even have some crusting.
 - **Vinegar soaks may help with crusting.** Mix 1 tablespoon distilled white vinegar with 1 cup boiled or distilled water and store in refrigerator. Soak clean washcloth in vinegar mix and apply to affected area for 10 minutes.
 - Apply moisturizers frequently. We recommend **Vanicream Moisturizing Ointment**, which can be purchased online or at checkout in our office.
- Use a strong sunscreen daily (e.g., Blue Lizard, Sensitive) and try to avoid direct sunlight.
- Wear a hat or protective clothing over treated areas.
- You may begin applying make-up once any crusting has healed.

