



Photodynamic Therapy (PDT)

Background

Photodynamic therapy is a form of treatment that involves applying a cream to the skin and then exposing the area to a red light. The cream contains aminolevulinic acid (ALA) that occurs naturally in the body. This substance is transformed into a porphyrin that is sensitive to light. Three hours after the cream was applied to the skin, the treatment area will be exposed to a visible red light. The energy from this light reacts with the porphyrin and the therapy begins to take effect. The resulting reaction destroys the unhealthy cells (tumour cells). Only the area of skin marked for treatment will be affected. Skin outside this area will not be affected by the treatment.

Treatment – practical details

On the morning of the day you arrive for your treatment we will begin by scraping the area to be treated. After that, we will apply a layer of ALA cream to the area and cover it with plastic wrap. This cream will need to stay on for three hours. You don't need to stay at the hospital during this time, but you are welcome to do so if you prefer. After the three hours have passed, we will begin treatment using the red light.

Many patients experience pain in connection with their treatment. This pain varies in intensity from mild to severe. While the pain a patient feels may be unpleasant, it is completely harmless. In some cases, the pain felt can be reduced by using either a local anaesthetic or a nerve block. In isolated cases, patients may experience pain for up to 10–12 hours after treatment. In such cases, patients can take painkillers containing paracetamol, or acetylsalicylic acid.

Recovery period

Your skin will turn red after your treatment and, after 24 hours or so, sores/blisters that may weep will usually appear. If the treatment area is on your face, you might also experience swelling in and around the area. This is normal. You can dress any sores using dry compresses.

You can shower and wash yourself as usual after your treatment. Don't expose the treated area to sunlight on the day of your treatment and for 48 hours afterwards. It will take approximately 2–4 weeks for the treated area to recover. Your skin lesion will then heal and will only rarely leave a scar. You will notice a certain redness in the area, but this will gradually disappear.

To avoid scarring and other cosmetic defects, it is important that you protect the treated area from sunlight. The best form of sun protection is clothing and wearing a broad-brimmed hat or a cap when outdoors. Sunscreens with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 and marked with the UVA symbol are recommended.

Contact

Hudbehandling och dagsjukvård Sahlgrenska, 031-342 11 12