Phototherapy (also called light therapy) involves exposing the skin to wavelengths of ultraviolet A light (UVA) or ultraviolet B light (UVB) under the supervision of a health care provider to treat psoriasis. Both UVA and UVB are found in natural sunlight. In phototherapy treatment, UV light penetrates the top layers of skin and stops the skin cells from growing too quickly, leading to improvement in psoriasis symptoms.

Treatment can be given in a health care provider’s office or at home with a prescription and instructions from your provider.

There are targeted and whole body phototherapy units. Targeted units are often used when less than 5 percent of the body surface is affected, and include hand and foot units, scalp wands and laser phototherapy. Whole body units are used when more than 5 percent of the body surface is affected or when symptoms are more widespread.

What is UVB phototherapy?

UVB phototherapy helps to slow the overactive growth of psoriasis skin cells. There are two types of UVB phototherapy: broad-band UVB and narrow-band UVB, which are named after the wavelength range that is used. The smaller range in narrow-band UVB uses the most effective wavelengths of light and reduces exposure to the more dangerous wavelengths responsible for sunburns and skin cancer. This is why narrow-band is more commonly used today.

What are some tips for phototherapy?

- **Avoid tanning devices.** The light used in phototherapy is different from the light used in tanning beds or booths.
- **Discuss all medicines that you’re using with your health care provider.** Some over-the-counter and prescription medicines may increase your risk for phototherapy side effects.
- **Have regular checkups.** Routine appointments with your health care provider can help with early diagnosis and treatment if there are any signs or symptoms of skin cancer.
- **Protect sensitive and unaffected areas.** This can be done with protective wear, such as goggles for the eyes and shields for the genital area. Always protect the face, lips, ears and nipples with sunscreen or cloth.
- **Soften and remove plaques safely.** This can make it easier for phototherapy treatments to penetrate the top layers of skin.
What is PUVA phototherapy?

PUVA is the combination of UVA with psoralen (a medicine that increases your sensitivity to light).

There are 2 types of PUVA phototherapy:

- Oral PUVA is taking psoralen by mouth as a pill about 1 to 2 hours before your UVA treatment.
- Topical PUVA is applying psoralen onto your skin about 30 minutes before your UVA treatment. This can be done as a bath for the whole body or for specific areas, such as the hands and feet.

How long will phototherapy results last?

How long treatment results last will vary, from 3 to 6 months up to 1 year or more. Generally you will have 2 to 3 treatments each week for 2 to 4 months or longer. The dosage and frequency may vary depending on your skin type, psoriasis severity and the type of phototherapy being used. Once you achieve remission (clearance of your symptoms), your health care provider will recommend whether you should continue with maintenance treatments to help increase the length of your remission.

What are the possible risks and side effects?

The possible risks and side effects differ depending on what type of phototherapy treatment you are using. Generally, possible side effects include burns or blisters, hyperpigmentation (changes in skin coloring), redness and/or premature aging of the skin.

There is a possible risk of skin cancers, especially non-melanoma skin cancer, from UVB and UVA phototherapy. Non-melanoma skin cancers are some of the most common forms of cancer, and can typically be quickly and easily removed when found early. Overall UVB is safer and has a lower risk than PUVA. It is important to have regular check-ups with your health care provider for signs of skin cancer each year when receiving phototherapy.

What is home phototherapy?

Home phototherapy may be a cost-effective and convenient treatment option that offers the same type of UVB phototherapy as in a health care provider’s office. Your health care provider will write you a prescription with treatment dosage and instructions for you to follow at home.

The following are some home phototherapy manufacturers that offer units in a range of sizes and prices.

- Clarify Medical at 877-738-6041 or ClarifyMed.com
- Daavlin at 800-322-8546 or Daavlin.com
- Luma Therapeutics at LumaTherapeutics.com
- National Biological Corp. at 800-338-5045 or NatBioCorp.com
- SolarC Systems Inc. at 866-813-3357 or SolarCSystems.com
- UVBioTek Phototherapy at 800-882-4683 or UVBioTek.com

What should I do next?

Contact our Patient Navigation Center to find providers, discuss treatments and get help with accessing treatments (find contact information below).