

Q4: How do you treat solar urticaria patients with ultraviolet phototherapy? Is it the same protocol as for Polymorphic Light Eruption (PLE) or is it more cautious?

A: Solar urticaria can usefully be treated with various ultraviolet phototherapies but usually this only happens after the patient has been assessed by a specialist photodiagnostic centre.

Solar urticaria phototherapy is usually straightforward **IF** the action spectrum of the solar urticaria is not emitted by the lamps used for treatment, for example:

- treating with narrowband UVB in someone only sensitive to UVA and visible light
- Using broadband UVA (treating in a PUVA cubicle but without psoralens) in someone only sensitive to UVB [1].

Rarely is phototherapy used as an actual desensitisation [2] - using a source that causes solar urticaria but can then induce a refractory state presumed because of depletion of mast cell mediators (this is the rationale behind so-called “rush therapy” which is a specialist method only rarely used).

Often in solar urticaria a longer course is delivered than prophylactic phototherapy for PLE or Actinic Prurigo (AP) – treating more similarly to narrowband UVB for any chronic urticaria.

Specialist phototesting will indicate the patient’s solar urticaria action spectrum. Usually, with solar urticaria, treating with ultraviolet phototherapy only on normally photoexposed sites (not whole body) is appropriate. Also ask the individual to wait in the department for 15 minutes after treatment in case solar urticaria is triggered by, depending upon the action spectrum, either the NB-UVB itself or the visible light that accompanies it. Otherwise, ultraviolet phototherapy is given as for PLE unless planning a longer urticaria treatment course.

References

1. Dawe, R.S. and Ferguson, J. Prolonged benefit following ultraviolet A phototherapy for solar urticaria. *British Journal of Dermatology*. 1997;137:144-148.
2. Dawe, R.S. Induction of tolerance in solar urticaria by ultraviolet A ‘rush hardening’: is this true desensitization? *British Journal of Dermatology*. 2012;167:4-5.