

Visudyne Therapy

Information and advice for patients

Ophthalmology

This guide is to help you understand what Visudyne therapy is and how it works. It contains useful information on what you can expect during treatment as well as some advice on what you should do before and after. If after reading this guide you have any questions about Visudyne therapy, please discuss them with your eye doctor.

What is Visudyne therapy?

Visudyne therapy is a treatment for certain retinal conditions such as Wet Age-Related Macular Degeneration (ARMD). It uses a combination of:

- A light-activated (photosensitive) drug called Visudyne
- A red light produced by a non-thermal laser

The Visudyne enters your body through a drip and then the red light is directed onto your retina. The therapy works by destroying abnormal blood vessels that grow behind the retina at the back of your eye. These abnormal vessels leak and bleed leading to deterioration of the macular (an area of the retina that provides central vision).

What are the benefits?

The benefit of Visudyne therapy is that in the majority of patients, it slows down the gradual loss of sight. For the majority of patients their vision will stabilise after Visudyne therapy. However some patients may need the treatment repeated.

Another benefit is unlike other treatments for wet ARMD, Visudyne therapy uses a non-thermal laser; the light produced by this laser does not burn the retina.

What are the risks?

The risks of Visudyne therapy include:

- Severe vision decrease (1-4 in 100 patients).
- Blurred vision and other visual disturbances. This is usually short-term.
- Back pain during infusion (less than 3 in 100 patients).
- Injection-site reactions such as pain, swelling, inflammation, leakage into the area surrounding the vein, bleeding at the injection site and hypersensitivity.

Please speak to your eye doctor if you experience any of these effects after Visudyne therapy.

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Important!

It is important that you let your doctor know if you have had any of the following as you may not be suitable for Visudyne therapy:

- had a severe reaction to previous intravenous injections
- a strong allergic history
- porphyria
- severe liver disease

If you think you might have an allergy to any part of Visudyne therapy or if you feel there is any reason why you should not be treated with Visudyne, please discuss these matters thoroughly with your eye doctor.

What are the risks of not having the therapy?

The risk of not having Visudyne therapy may mean that your sight will not be stabilised and you may lose your vision. This will be discussed in more detail with your eye doctor.

Are there any alternatives to this therapy?

This will depend on your condition. Some patients may be able to have Lucentis (an injection into the eyeball which may help to maintain or improve vision); however Visudyne therapy is usually given for retinal conditions where there are no alternatives. You can discuss this with your eye doctor.

Preparing for Visudyne therapy

Visudyne therapy will cause your skin and eyes to become more sensitive to light. To reduce this sensitivity please bring (or wear) the following items with you to your appointment:

- A wide-brimmed hat
- Dark sunglasses
- Clothing that will fully cover your arms and leg
- Socks and shoes

These items will need to be worn after the treatment session.

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During the therapy

1. You will meet the nurse who will prepare you for the treatment and will be asked to complete a consent form.
2. You will have a cannula inserted into your arm or back of your hand which will be attached to a 'drip'. The Visudyne will be given through the drip for about 10 minutes.
3. Your eye doctor will then numb your eye with eye drops and place a special contact lens on your eye.
4. Shortly after this, a red light will be directed through the contact lens and onto the affected area of the retina. The light is applied for 83 seconds or less, depending on the condition treated. Because the red light is produced by a non-thermal laser there is no heating or burning.

At the end of the treatment you will be given a bracelet to wear for the first 48 hours. This is a precaution and is intended to remind you and other healthcare professionals that you have received Visudyne therapy.

After the therapy

If you do go out during daylight hours within the first 48 hours following treatment, it is recommended that you wear the items described on page 2 to protect your skin and eyes.

You may have some blurring of eyesight in the 48 hours following treatment, but this is usually short lived.

After 48 hours you may resume normal outdoor activities without any special precautions. You should not stay in the dark. In fact, exposing your skin to indoor light helps to inactivate any remaining drug in the skin.

Common symptoms

Common symptoms after Visudyne therapy include problems with vision such as blurriness, seeing sparks or light when your eyes are closed and decreased vision. You may also experience discomfort from the Visudyne drip, symptoms include discolouration, inflammation, rashes and back pain.

All of the above are normal and your body should go back to normal.

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Follow-up and results

Visudyne therapy normally involves more than one treatment to permanently close the leaking blood vessels.

Your eye doctor will normally ask you to come back every 3 months to assess your eye. He/she will usually check your vision, take some pictures of your eye and carry out a dye test (fluorescein angiography) to determine if another treatment would be beneficial.

You can expect to receive between 2 and 4 treatments in the first year, decreasing in the second and third year of therapy.

Symptoms to report

If the symptoms are severe such as an allergic reaction or severe pain you may need to go the hospital A&E.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns please contact us.

City Hospital: 0121 554 3801

Sandwell Hospital: 0121 553 1831

Nurse outpatient department: 0121 507 6754

Eye A&E: 0121 507 6780, 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am to 6pm Sundays

Further information

RNIB

Royal National Institute of Blind People

105 Judd Street

London

WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0303 123 9999

Website: www.rnib.org.uk

AMD Alliance

Website: www.amdalliance.org

Email: info@amdalliance.org

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The Royal College of Ophthalmologists

Tel: 020 7935 0702

Website: www.rcophth.ac.uk

Focus Birmingham

Tel: 0121 478 5222

Website: www.focusbirmingham.org.uk

The Macular Disease Society

PO Box 1870

Andover

SP10 9AD

Website: www.maculardisease.org

Email: info@maculardisease.org

Tel: 01264 350551

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

References

- National Institute for Clinical Excellence, 'Guidance on the use of photodynamic therapy for age-related macular degeneration' 2003

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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