

UVB phototherapy and skin cancer risk: a review of the literature.

Lee E¹, Koo J, Berger T.

Author information

- ¹University of California, Department of Dermatology, Psoriasis Treatment Center, 515 Spruce Street, San Francisco, CA 94118, USA.

Abstract

BACKGROUND:

UVB phototherapy is a common treatment modality for psoriasis and other skin diseases. Although UVB has been in use for many decades, many clinicians are hesitant to use this type of phototherapy because of concern over increasing the skin cancer risk. Over the past 20 years, numerous studies have been published examining this issue, but a consensus or analysis of the skin cancer risk is required for the dermatologist to make an educated risk-benefit analysis.

OBJECTIVE:

To assess the risk of skin cancer associated with UVB phototherapy.

METHODS:

All prospective or retrospective studies were identified in MEDLINE from 1966 to June 2002. Bibliographies were searched to identify any additional studies examining this issue. All studies that attempted to quantify or qualify any additional skin cancer risk from UVB phototherapy were included. Study selection was performed by two independent reviewers.

RESULTS:

Eleven studies (10 of which concerned psoriasis patients), involving approximately 3400 participants, were included. Of note, three of the studies involved the same cohort: members of the 16-center US Psoralen plus UVA (PUVA) Follow-up Study: Other than the most recent Finnish study, all studies eventually showed no increased skin cancer risk with UVB phototherapy. One of the PUVA cohort studies examined genital skin cancers, and found an increased rate of genital tumors associated with UVB phototherapy, although this study has not been duplicated.

CONCLUSION:

The evidence suggests that UVB phototherapy remains a very safe treatment modality.

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