

## **EFUDEX (5-Fluorouracil, 5-U)**

### **General Information**

1. Efudex is a chemotherapy medication when taken by mouth; however, in dermatology we use it to treat skin conditions such as warts, some skin cancers and most commonly actinic (solar) keratoses. When applied topically the medication is **not** absorbed into the bloodstream and does not cause typical chemotherapy side effects. It is safe to your body.
2. Efudex works by destroying the damaged cells on your skin. As a result it causes redness, irritation, and scabbing. This is a normal part of therapeutic skin response to Efudex.
3. The treated areas need to be completely protected from the sun during the treatment and the recovery process. If you need to go out into the sun, cover the area with a hat, long sleeve shirts, gloves, etc.
4. Treatment approaches vary depending on the condition that is being treated. Your doctor will specify which approach is right for you.

### **Instructions for Use**

#### **Approach 1: Continuous and daily therapy over a region of the skin**

- This approach is used when you have widespread involvement over an area
- Use Efudex twice daily.
- The duration of treatment depends on the skin condition. Typically it takes 2-3 weeks for the face, 4-6 weeks for the scalp, arms and legs.
- You can make an appointment with our nurse one week into your treatment course to ensure that your treatment is proceeding as expected. You can make this appointment at the time of your doctor visit or contact the Dermatology Department to arrange a nurse visit for Efudex check.

#### **Approach 2: Spot Treating**

- This approach is used for an isolated lesion or for a few isolated lesions.
- Use the Efudex cream twice daily to individual lesions. You can apply the medicine with a Q-tip or use your fingers, but if fingers are used be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after use to avoid irritation on other skin areas.
- The duration of treatment depends on the skin condition. Typically it takes 2-3 weeks for the face, 4-6 weeks for the scalp, arms and legs.
- The desired “end-point” of treatment is scaling, crust and redness at the treated site without a bump being present to indicate the lesion is still present.

#### **Approach 3: Weekly treatment over an extended period**

- Your physician may recommend weekly treatment over an extended period. Specific details of this will be given by your physician at the time of your appointment.

### What to Expect During Therapy

- **Redness** is caused by inflammation and destruction of the abnormal cells and indicates your lesions are responding to the treatment. You may use an over-the-counter 1% hydrocortisone ointment to decrease redness, although the treatment may be somewhat more effective if you are able to avoid cortisone use. It takes 2-4 weeks for the redness to fade after stopping the Efudex; most of the redness resolves over the first 1-2 weeks.
- **Crusting and peeling** occurs as the sun-damaged skin is removed to allow for replacement by normal skin. Cool washcloth soaks (washcloth soaked with cool water over face for 15-20 minutes 3-4 times per day) can help as well as a moisturizing ointment, such as Vaseline or Aquaphor ointment. It is preferable to be **moisturized rather than have the skin be dry**. It is fine to wash your face with plain water or a mild cleanser such as Dove or Cetaphil during your treatment course.
- **Itching and pain** can be controlled with acetaminophen (Tylenol) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication (ibuprofen, naproxen)

### In Addition

- You can apply the Efudex with a Q-tip (if spot treating), gloves or fingers. If fingers are used, however, remember to **wash your hands** thoroughly to avoid irritation on normal skin.
- Care must be taken with Efudex during sunny months because the medicine is **reactive with the sun. DO NOT USE EFUDEX IN SUMMER MONTHS** unless specifically directed to by your doctor.
- Do NOT use Efudex on eyelids or lips unless specifically directed to do so.
- Care must be taken with Efudex in skin fold areas like the fold from the nose to the corner of the mouth. Try to avoid having any Efudex accumulate in those areas.
- Not all bumps will respond to the Efudex. There are benign types of keratoses that will not react to the medication (such as seborrheic keratoses). If the area treated is not getting red it does not mean the medicine isn't working.
- Consider the Efudex as an **investment in the health of your skin**; the benefits of “sticking it out” are worth it! Efudex is an excellent way to reverse many years of sun damage.

### When to contact your provider

- Once you have completed your prescribed course of therapy, wait for a period of 4 weeks to see if treated areas resolve. If you have lesions that have not responded, make a follow-up appointment with your doctor in about 8 weeks. In evaluating unresponsive areas your doctor will need the skin completely “settled down” this usually takes a period of at least two months.
- If having extensive burning, itching, swelling or tenderness call the Dermatology Department to arrange an **Efudex check with our nurse**, who has extensive experience with Efudex treatment. Although the Efudex treatment sometimes produces dramatic redness, crusting and peeling, **problems such as allergic reactions and infection are rare**.