Topical Fluorouracil

Fluorouracil is the active ingredient in a number of medications including Efudex®, Carac®, and generics. Its most common use in dermatology is to treat ‘actinic keratoses’ and certain skin cancers. Fluorouracil specifically kills atypical, rapidly-growing cells while allowing healthy skin to survive.

The most important thing to know about this treatment is that the application sites will become inflamed. However, significant inflammation isn’t usually noticeable until 5-7 days after treatment has started. You can expect any resulting redness, sensitivity, or slight crusting to worsen up until the point that the medication is stopped. It then takes about a week to resolve. Because of this, you should carefully consider your social and/or business obligations when planning to start this treatment.

Other considerations:

1) Avoid exposing treatment areas to prolonged direct sunlight.
2) Covering the treatment sites with a bandage (while the medication is still on your skin) can cause a much stronger reaction and generally should be avoided. If you must cover a treatment site, simply make sure that the area is thoroughly cleansed and free of medication before applying any bandages.
3) A light coat of makeup may be worn over the affected areas during the daytime if you’re applying Fluorouracil at night. It is generally recommended to avoid using Fluorouracil under makeup unless otherwise directed by your physician.
4) Don’t worry if you miss an application or two for any reason. It should not affect the outcome.
5) The goal is to use this medication for the full duration prescribed. As seen in the above chart, the redness and irritation you experience is expected. However, if at any time you feel that the reaction is too strong or uncomfortable, discontinue its use and contact your physician.
6) At the end of the treatment, you may use an ointment such as Aquaphor® or Hydrocortisone 1% to soothe any discomfort. Either of these are available over-the-counter without a prescription.

Treatment Instructions

To Be Applied: □ Once per day □ Twice per day □ Other ________________

Application Site(s): ____________________________________________________

Treatment Duration: □ 2 Weeks □ 3 Weeks □ 4 Weeks □ Other ________________