



Instructions for use of 5-Fluorouracil

General Information

5 - Fluorouracil (also known as Efudex, Fluoroplex and Carac) is a medication used to treat actinic keratosis and select superficial types of Squamous Cell Carcinoma (Squamous cell carcinoma in situ or Bowens Disease). The medication is a chemotherapy medication known as an antimetabolite. It works by incorporating into the DNA of rapidly dividing cells (pre-cancerous and cancer cells) and causing cell death. The benefit of using this medication is that it does not affect normal skin. When used topically (in the form of a cream or solution) there is negligible systemic absorption. Therefore, adverse effects are limited to the skin.

How to use

The medication is used as a once daily (for the 0.5% cream) or more commonly twice daily application (for the 1,2 and 5% formulations). It can be applied using a small amount on the finger and rubbing a thin layer into the treatment area. The hands should be washed after application. Avoid application to sensitive areas such as the eyes, and take special care in skin folds (crease around the nose) and to the mouth. When applying the medication to the lips, first apply a layer of white petrolatum (Vaseline or Aquaphor) to the mucosal surface and then apply the medication to border of the lip and the skin.

Duration of Therapy

The duration of treatment depends upon the area and lesion being treated. Unless directed otherwise, the end point of treatment is crusting. Once crusting is achieved the treatment can be stopped. At that point the sites should be cleansed gently with soap and water followed by application of a white petrolatum ointment such as Aquaphor Healing Ointment or Vaseline. In general one can expect the treatment duration to be approximately 2-3 weeks on the face, 1 week on the lips, and up to 4-6 weeks for the scalp and extremities.

Expected Effects

One should expect to experience no reaction initially followed by development of redness and swelling of lesions. The abnormal lesions will get increasingly red and will begin to ooze and crust at which point therapy is typically complete. A white petrolatum ointment (Aquaphor or Vaseline) can then be applied several times daily to allow faster healing. Make-up should not be applied until all lesions have healed and there are no longer open wounds. One should expect approximately 2 weeks of healing once crusting is achieved. Pink discoloration can persist thereafter and progressively fades.