Commonly Asked Questions:

How long does the procedure take?
Typically the procedure takes between two to four hours.

Is the procedure painful?
You may feel discomfort from the IV stick at the beginning of the procedure; however, most patients do not feel any pain. You may experience sensations during the procedure such as a slight pulsing from the photopheresis machine and/or a slight chill or cool feeling when the blood re-enters the body.

What condition(s) is photopheresis used to treat?
Cutaneous T-cell Lymphoma, Graft-Versus-Host Disease (GVHD), Heart and Lung Transplant Rejection, and other diseases.

How do I make an appointment?
You can call our department at 619-543-5977, or email us at apheresis@ucsd.edu.

Apheresis Program

200 W. Arbor Drive, San Diego, CA. 92103
Phone: 619-543-5977
Fax: 619-543-7367
Email: apheresis@ucsd.edu

Website:
http://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/apheresis/Pages/default.aspx
The procedure happens in 5 steps:
To help our patients feel more comfortable about undergoing photopheresis, it is important to explain the basic procedure:

**Step 1**
An intravenous (IV) line is inserted into the arm - common procedure for patients with good veins. If the arm veins are small, then a port access or central line can be placed before the procedure - an appointment will be made for the placement.

**Step 2**
The patient’s blood is withdrawn and enters the photopheresis machine, which separates the white blood cells involved in the immune response, from the other components of the blood. The white blood cells remain in the machine for treatment, while the rest of the blood is returned back to the patient.

**Step 3**
A medication, UVADEX® (Methoxsalen) Sterile Solution, is added to the separated white blood cells.

**Step 4**
These white blood cells are then exposed to ultraviolet-A light (UVA), which activates the medication.

**Step 5**
The treated white blood cells are then returned to the patient’s body.

**History:**
Here at UC San Diego, we have been performing photopheresis procedures since May 2003. Our staff are highly skilled and our unit prides itself on its high patient satisfaction rates. Our mission is to provide a safe and caring environment, ensuring our patients are informed and comfortable.

**What to expect:**
Treatment is typically performed in a reclining chair. You will remain connected to the photopheresis machine for the duration of the procedure. You will be able to read, watch television, eat, listen to music, or just relax until the treatment is completed. Although the time varies from patient to patient, the procedure typically takes about two to four hours.

**Before treatment:**
There are a few important instructions that patients should follow prior to receiving photopheresis therapy.

**For the 2 days before treatment:**
- Drink plenty of fluids - avoid caffeine and alcohol.

**On the evening before treatment:**
- Eat a low-fat meal - avoid high-fat meat, fried food, cream, cheese, eggs, butter and dessert.

**On the day of treatment:**
- Do not skip any meals.
- Eat a low-fat breakfast and lunch.
- For three hours before photopheresis, drink as little fluid as possible.
- Visit the restroom immediately before the procedure.
- Let your apheresis doctor know about any medications you take daily, including vitamins and herbal products.
- Be sure to follow your healthcare providers instructions as you prepare for treatment.

**Response to Treatment:**
For many patients, photopheresis has had very positive effects; however, some patients do not respond to treatment. As with any medical treatment, it is difficult to predict the type of response an individual may have, and to what degree.

**Precautions:**
- Avoid fatty foods for 24 hours before each treatment. High levels of fat in the blood interferes with the cell separation process, which could result in the treatment being stopped before it is completed.
- Avoid direct and indirect sunlight and wear dark glasses for 24 hours after each treatment, as your eyes and skin will be temporarily more sensitive to sunlight. We recommend you use dark wrap-around UVA/UVB sunglasses, use sunscreen SPF 15 or higher, and wear long-sleeved shirts, pants and a hat.
- Patients have an increased risk of bleeding for 8 hours following the procedure, as heparin is used to prevent the collected blood from clotting. Bleeding precautions must be observed. Please talk to the apheresis doctor before scheduling any biopsies, surgeries or invasive procedures.

**Potential Side Effects:**
You may have discomfort at the needle site, and occasional light-headedness or nausea during the treatment. If you experience any symptoms please notify your nurse immediately.