

TBYlearn | something new

ant interlude in a busy day.

“It’s just warm,” she said. “I’m in and out in a few minutes.”

Kitchen said she also continues to use a prescription topical cream along with the light treatments.

Tanning booths use UVB rays to produce a tan, which explains how Schlueter’s tanning customers were finding relief from their psoriasis. After getting training she opened Healing Rays.

“Insurance won’t pay for tanning but it will pay for this,” Schlueter said. Her therapy is covered by Medicare and most other major insurance companies.

Healing Rays uses narrow-band UVB, which penetrates the skin and slows down the rapid growth of skin cells. Psoriasis is an autoimmune disease, Schlueter said. The body normally sloughs off dead skin cells about once a month. With psoriasis, she said, the body keeps making these cells, which build up. Psoriasis can develop at any time, although babies have been born with it, Schlueter said. Some people have a mild case of it with itching and scaling; others have it so severe that

it can crack the skin and cause pain. Although unsightly, it is not contagious.

“It never goes away,” Schlueter said.

“With treatment, for 85 percent of the people it will clear up in six months.

That’s the best scenario; something that has never happened before. That’s why it is so exciting.”

Broadband UVB rays are more commonly used, but the narrow-band treatment Healing Rays uses is gaining popularity because it clears psoriasis faster and produces longer remissions, according to the National Psoriasis Foundation.

Schlueter and her staff of two were trained first at the National Psoriasis Foundation in Chicago and later through Vanderbilt University. Because phototherapy is relatively new and she is not a medical professional, Schlueter works in conjunction with Dr. Vishnu Subramani, whose practice is in the same location; he serves as her business’ medical director. She treats only those clients whose doctors have referred them to her. Healing Rays is the only clinic of its kind between St. Louis and Memphis.

How it works

* Treatment is administered three times a week. Petroleum jelly is applied to protect the skin. The first dose lasts about 10 seconds, and each subsequent dose is increased by 10 seconds until they reach a point where the patient’s skin begins to turn pink. No more increases are given at that point to avoid burning, but the dose continues at that level until the condition improves. Once the skin clears, treatments can stop or be continued on a maintenance basis. The frequency of treatment and the intensity of the light varies with each person based on the type of skin and on how extensive the psoriasis is. Most patients show improvement in about 10 weeks.

* Most of the people who come to Healing Rays come for treatment of psoriasis or eczema, but the phototherapy is also effective on alopecia, vitiligo, mycosis fungoides, uremic pruritus, photosensitivity pityriasis rosea, lichen planus, folliculitis and other photoresponsive diseases. It is safe for use on children, Schlueter said, although most of her patients are middle-aged or older. It is safe also for pregnant women. Care is taken during treatment to protect the eyes and other sensitive areas of the body.

* Side effects include a possible worsening of the psoriasis before it begins to improve, Schlueter said. The patient’s skin may be sensitive to the UVB rays and the dose may need to be reduced. Patients should avoid exposure to the sun while receiving treatment. Certain medications and herbal supplements can cause sensitivity to light and may need to be avoided.