

Let's Talk About...

Skin disorder: Vitiligo

What is vitiligo?

Vitiligo (vit-ih-LIE-go) is a condition that causes patches of white or lighter-colored skin to develop. It commonly affects areas that are rubbed often, like the hands, elbows, knees, top of the feet, and waist. Vitiligo can also affect the skin around the mouth, nose, and eyes, the inner lining of the mouth and nose, and the genitals. It is harmless and usually does not have other symptoms, but it can sometimes cause itching.

How often does vitiligo occur?

Vitiligo is common and affects up to 2% of people worldwide. It can be genetic (run in families) and can affect people of all skin types and ages. However, it is not contagious (can't spread from one person to another).

What causes vitiligo?

Vitiligo is an autoimmune condition, which means the body's immune system attacks the melanocytes (mel-AN-oh-sites), the cells that make pigment (color) in the skin. Vitiligo can also be linked to other autoimmune conditions like thyroid disease. Because of this, your child's doctor may check your child's thyroid levels during checkups with a blood test.

How will vitiligo affect my child?

Your child may not like how their skin looks and may be bothered by it. They may also be bullied at school because their skin looks different. If this happens, you may consider taking your child to a psychologist for help. Managing or treating the vitiligo can also help.



What happens if my child has vitiligo?

Vitiligo usually causes white patches to develop and get bigger over time, but every person is different. Some children's vitiligo never gets worse, and some children's vitiligo gets worse quickly. Your child may also:

- Have spontaneous repigmentation (re-pig-men-TAY-shun), where normal color returns
- Have hyperpigmentation (HI-per-pig-men-TAY-shun), where skin becomes darker after normal color returns
- Have segmental vitiligo (only a single strip of skin is affected)

How do I help my child manage their vitiligo?

To help your child manage their vitiligo without active treatment:

- Encourage them not to tan their normal skin. Tanning can make vitiligo more noticeable when the surrounding skin is even darker.
- Make sure they always use sunscreen (at least SPF 50) on their vitiligo areas not covered by clothing. Vitiligo can be easily sunburned.
- Consider using makeup or self-tanner to make vitiligo less noticeable.

How is vitiligo treated?

Treatment options for vitiligo may include:

- Creams with corticosteroids or calcineurin (cal-sih-N00-rin) inhibitors (anti-inflammatory medicine), which can return pigment to the skin. Be careful using steroid creams, as they can thin the skin.
- Light therapy (controlled exposure to UVB light or the sun) 2–3 times a week for several months to return pigment to the skin. This can sometimes make surrounding skin darker or cause hyperpigmentation (darkening) where repigmentation occurs. Your child may also have a small increased risk of skin cancer.

Talk to your child’s dermatologist about treatment options and whether they would be best for your child.

Notes

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