

# VITILIGO

## WHAT IT IS

Vitiligo is an autoimmune skin condition that causes white patches on the body due to the loss of cells that produce the pigment melanin, responsible for skin, hair and eye colour.

## RISK FACTORS

An estimated 0.5% to 2% of the general population has vitiligo. While the condition is seen in both sexes and all races, it is more noticeable in people with deeper skin tones (e.g. brown and black). Vitiligo can start at any age, but about half of those with the condition develop it before age 20, and about 95% before age 40.

Genetics are believed to play a role in the development of vitiligo, so if you have the condition, there is a chance some, or all, of your children will as well. About 1/3 of all vitiligo cases cluster in the same family groups.

## CAUSES

Vitiligo is believed to be caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. It occurs most often in people with certain autoimmune diseases.



**While not a dangerous or life-threatening condition, vitiligo can have negative psychological effects and result in embarrassment, a loss of self-esteem and social isolation.**



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Milky-white, irregularly shaped patches on the skin, especially on sun-exposed areas (face, hands, feet, arms, legs).
- Patches can also commonly occur or spread to the armpit, groin, around the mouth, eyes, nostrils, navel, and genital and rectal areas.
- Premature whitening or greying of hair on the scalp, eyelashes, eyebrows or beard.
- Colour loss in the mucus membranes inside the mouth and nose.

While the spread of vitiligo may stop for several months or years, it can reoccur at any time, with this cycle repeating throughout a person's lifetime. Sometimes, some areas of skin may regain pigment spontaneously.

## IMPACT

Vitiligo can affect all skin tones and is not more dangerous in darker skin, however, people with darker skin tones or those facing cultural biases may experience unique challenges in coping with vitiligo. The psychological impact of the condition can be more significant when it is more noticeable.

Vitiligo affects the skin, hair and mucus membranes and in some cases can cause changes in vision and tear production. Some people can also develop other autoimmune diseases.



## TREATMENT

Although there is no cure for vitiligo, there are several approaches that can mask or lessen its effect. Treatments are available to help to restore white patches to their original colour (repigmentation) or destroy the remaining colour to match the white patches (depigmentation).

### Commonly used treatments include:

- Corticosteroid creams or ointments
- Non-steroid topical immunomodulators
- Phototherapy
- Depigmentation treatments with Monobenzyl ether of hydroquinone (monobenzene)
- JAK inhibitors (applied as a cream)
- Transplant surgery
- Tattooing (micropigmentation). *This approach is only recommended in certain situations.*



**Additional information on Vitiligo is available online.**

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