



What is it?

Points To Remember About Vitiligo

- Vitiligo causes white patches, which may or may not spread, to appear on your skin.
- Doctors don't know what causes vitiligo, but it may be an autoimmune disease. It also seems to run in families.
- Treatments may help restore color to the white patches of your skin, but they don't work for everyone, and sometimes they have unwanted side effects.
- It's important to have a supportive doctor and emotional support from family and friends. You may also want to join a vitiligo support group in your area.

Vitiligo (vit-ill-EYE-go) is a disorder that causes patches of skin to become white. This happens because cells that make color in your skin are destroyed.

Who gets it?

Anyone can get vitiligo, but it is more noticeable on people with dark skin. Many people who have vitiligo start to get the white patches in their 20s.

What are the symptoms?

Vitiligo causes white patches of skin. They often appear on parts of the body that are exposed to the sun, such as your hands, feet, arms, and face. The patches also often appear on the armpits, eyes, groin (where your leg meets your body), genitals, belly button, and rectal area.

The white patches may spread. Segmental vitiligo stays on one part of the body and does not spread. Nonsegmental vitiligo usually spreads. For some people, the white patches spread very slowly, maybe over a period of several years, but in others, they spread very quickly. For some people, the patches do not spread at all.

Some people with vitiligo have hair that turns gray early. Some people with dark skin also notice a loss of color in their mouths.

What causes it?

Doctors don't know what causes vitiligo, but some think it may be an autoimmune disease – a type of condition where your body's immune system starts attacking your own cells. Some research has found that people with vitiligo tend to have certain genes, and it also sometimes runs in families. You are more likely to get vitiligo if one of your parents has it or if you have certain autoimmune diseases.

Some people have reported that they developed vitiligo or their vitiligo got worse after sunburns or emotional distress, but researchers aren't sure that's what caused their vitiligo.

Is there a test?

To figure out if you have vitiligo, your doctor will probably look at your skin, examine you to rule out other illnesses, ask some questions, and do some tests.

Some questions your doctor might ask are:

- Do any of your family members have vitiligo?
- Do you or any of your family members have any autoimmune diseases?
- Did you have a rash, sunburn, or other skin problem before the white patches appeared?
- Did you have something stressful happen or did you have a physical illness?
- Did your hair turn gray before age 35?
- Are you sensitive to the sun?

Tests might include:

- Taking a small sample of your skin to be examined.
- Blood tests.
- An eye exam.

How is it treated?

Vitiligo is not usually medically harmful, but the white patches can cause emotional distress. Most treatments for vitiligo are designed to help restore color to the white patches of skin. For some people, treatment helps make the skin color look more even, but many treatments can have unwanted side effects. Treatments can take a long time, and sometimes they don't work.

Medical treatments can include:

- Medicines or medicated skin creams.
- A combination of ultraviolet light treatment and medicine.
- Removing color from dark areas of the skin so they match the white patches.
- Tattooing small areas of skin.
- Surgery, when topical creams and light therapy do not work.

Who treats it?

A number of doctors can diagnose and treat vitiligo. These include:

- Dermatologists, who treat skin problems.
- Primary care physicians or internists.
- Other specialists, such as ophthalmologists (who treat eye problems), may also provide care.

Living With It

Health care professionals can recommend treatments for your vitiligo, but you can also take part in your own care.

- Sunscreen can help protect your skin from long-term damage.
- Cosmetics, such as self-tanning lotions or dyes, can cover the white patches.

Some people with vitiligo are upset or depressed about the changes in their appearance. Counseling and support can help you cope with the disorder.

- Find a doctor who knows how to treat vitiligo. The doctor should also be a good listener and provide emotional support.
- Learn about the disorder and treatments to help you make decisions about care.
- Talk with other people who have vitiligo. A vitiligo group may help you find a support group in your area.
- Your family and friends can also support you.

For More Info

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

[Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf> [Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

American Academy of Dermatology

Website: <http://www.aad.org>

American Vitiligo Research Foundation

Website: <http://www.avrf.org>

National Vitiligo Foundation, Inc.

Website: <http://www.mynvfi.org>

Vitiligo Support International Inc.

Website: <http://www.vitiligosupport.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov.

- [Asian Language Health Information](#)

- [Spanish Language Health Information](#)

Related Information

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