



Points To Remember About Vitiligo

- Vitiligo is a chronic (long-lasting) disorder that causes areas of skin to lose color.
- No one knows the exact cause of vitiligo. It may be an autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system attacks and destroys the skin cells that make color.
- There is no cure for vitiligo. Treatment goals are to slow or stop the disease, help skin cells that make color to grow again, and to bring back color to the white patches of skin.
- Living with vitiligo can be hard. You can help manage the disease by finding a doctor who has treated people with vitiligo. Talking to a counselor and reaching out to family and friends for support can help you cope.

What is vitiligo?

Vitiligo is a chronic (long-lasting) disorder that causes areas of skin to lose color. When skin cells that make color are attacked and destroyed, the skin turns a milky-white color.

No one knows what causes vitiligo, but it may be an [autoimmune disease](#). In people with autoimmune diseases, the immune cells attack the body's own healthy tissues by mistake, instead of viruses or bacteria.

A person with vitiligo sometimes may have family members who also have the disease. There is no cure for vitiligo, but treatment may help skin tone appear more even.

Who gets vitiligo?

Anyone can get vitiligo, and it can happen at any age. For many people, the white patches show up before age 20.

Vitiligo seems to happen more in people who have family members with the disorder or who have certain autoimmune diseases, such as [rheumatoid arthritis](#) and type 1 diabetes.

What are the symptoms of vitiligo?

The main symptom of vitiligo is loss of natural color. The patches can show up on any part of your body and can affect:

- Skin, which gets milky-white patches, usually on the hands, feet, arms, and face.
- Hair, which can turn white on the scalp, eyebrow, eyelash, and beard.
- The inside of your mouth or nose.

People with vitiligo can also get problems with the eyes and ears. In addition, people with the disorder may worry about how their skin looks, which can affect general well-being.

What causes vitiligo?

No one knows the exact cause of vitiligo. It may be an autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system attacks and destroys the skin cells that make color. Also, your family history and genes may play a role in causing vitiligo.

Finally, sometimes a sunburn, stressful life event, or contact with a chemical can make vitiligo start or make it worse.

Is there a test for vitiligo?

To see if you have vitiligo, your doctor may ask about your family history and do a full physical exam. The doctor may use a special tool that shines a black light on your skin.

Your doctor may also run blood tests, check your eyes, or take a small sample of your skin to be looked at under a microscope.

How is vitiligo treated?

In most cases, the goals of your treatment are to:

- Slow or stop the disease.
- Help skin cells that make color to grow again.
- Bring back color to the white patches of skin.

Treatments do not always work for every person. Also, new patches of vitiligo may form. You may need more than one treatment to get the best results.

Treatments can include:

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Medicines or medicated skin creams, which may be able to return color to the white patches of skin.

- Use of light therapy to help return color to the skin.
- Removal of color from dark areas of the skin so they match the white patches. You usually will only get this treatment if you have vitiligo on more than half of your body.
- Types of surgery if other treatments do not work.

Who treats vitiligo?

Health care providers who treat vitiligo include:

- Dermatologists, who focus on disorders of the skin, hair, and nails.
- Primary care physicians, such as a family practitioner or internist.
- Other specialists, such as ophthalmologists (who treat eye problems) may also provide care.

Living with vitiligo

Living with vitiligo can be hard. Some people with the disorder feel embarrassed, sad, ashamed, or upset about how their skin looks. Sometimes, this can lead to low self-esteem and depression. Seeking help from a counselor or therapist can help you cope.

You can help manage vitiligo by:

- Using sunscreen and wearing clothes to protect your skin.
- Wearing self-tanning lotions or dyes to cover white patches of skin.
- Finding a doctor who has treated other people with vitiligo.
- Learning about the disorder and treatments to help you make decisions about your care.
- Finding a vitiligo support group, either in person or online.
- Reaching out to family and friends for support.

For more info

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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

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

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