



Vitiligo

Vitiligo is a loss of skin pigment, or color, that causes white patches to appear on the skin.

What is vitiligo?

Vitiligo (vit-ih-LI-go) is a loss of skin pigment, or color, that causes white spots or patches to appear on the skin. The condition is caused by the body's immune system destroying the cells in the skin that make pigment (melanocytes). As a result, white (depigmented) patches appear on the skin in different areas of the body. It usually starts as small areas that spread and become larger. It can happen on any part of the body.

The natural course of vitiligo is difficult to predict. Sometimes only a small area of the body will be affected. Very rarely, pigment loss can happen all over the body. Vitiligo is not contagious – it cannot be spread from person to person.

Are there related health concerns?

Most children with vitiligo are otherwise healthy. There may be a family history of autoimmune diseases. Rarely, a person with vitiligo can develop other autoimmune diseases such as thyroid disease, hair loss (alopecia areata), or diabetes mellitus. It is important to let your child's doctor know about any unexplained symptoms like fatigue, weight changes, heat or cold intolerance, hair loss, and drinking or peeing more frequently.

Dealing with the emotional impact

It can be difficult for children to deal with the emotional impact of having vitiligo because they can view themselves as “different” than everyone else. Some children don't mind their spots, but others are more affected. Talk with your child about vitiligo in a positive way and promote an open conversation about their feelings. Let your child's healthcare provider know if your child exhibits any mood changes.

Treatment

Treatment for vitiligo can be difficult. Not all people respond to treatment. Patches may stop forming without treatment, and occasionally spontaneous improvement (repigmentation) can be seen. Check with your child's healthcare provider before giving any type of medicine to your child.

Steroid creams

A commonly used first-line treatment is the application of steroid creams to the skin (topical). They can be applied to the affected areas as directed by your healthcare provider. Potential risks of topical steroids include thinning of the skin, stretch marks, and suppressing the body's ability to make cortisol (a hormone released by the body in response to stress). This will only occur if the steroid cream is overused. Topical steroids are safe to use if you follow the instructions given.

To Learn More

- Dermatology
206-987-2158
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Topical calcineurin inhibitors

Topical calcineurin inhibitors are a type of medicine that works without steroids (non-steroidal). They are applied to the skin (topical). They are for more delicate areas of the body like the face and neck. They come in the form of creams or ointments. Just like topical steroids, they can help re-pigment the skin, but they have different side effects. Your child's healthcare provider can talk about them with you.

Light treatment

Light treatment (phototherapy) may be considered for patients with widespread vitiligo or those who don't respond to other treatments. Phototherapy should be done under the direction of a dermatologist and requires frequent office visits. Although we use light therapy to treat vitiligo, it is important to be careful in the sun as the depigmented areas can easily sunburn, which may make the vitiligo worse and increase the risk of developing skin cancer.

Cosmetics

Sometimes people choose to cover the white areas with makeup. There are several companies that sell makeup specifically designed for patients with skin conditions like vitiligo (such as Dermablend and Covermark).

Where can I find more information?

- National Vitiligo Foundation www.nvfi.org
- "Vitiligo" kidshealth.org/parent/infections/skin/vitiligo.html#