

Vitiligo 101: Fast Facts about Vitiligo

WHAT IS VITILIGO?

Vitiligo is a condition in which pigment is lost from areas of the skin, causing white patches. It has also been known to affect pigment in hair and eyes, although this is less common.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE VITILIGO?

About 1% of the world's population (50 million people) has vitiligo. In the United States, 2 to 5 million people have the condition. Many people develop vitiligo in their twenties, but it can occur at any age. The condition affects all races and both sexes equally.

WHAT CAUSES VITILIGO?

Vitiligo occurs when melanin-forming cells (melanocytes) die and stop producing melanin – the pigment that gives skin, hair and eyes color. The involved patches of skin become lighter or white, but doctors do not know what causes the cells to fail or die. It may be related to an autoimmune disease, family history or a trigger event such as sunburn or emotional distress.

WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF VITILIGO?

The main sign of vitiligo is loss of color (pigment) on the skin in the form of white patches. Patches can appear on many parts of the body, on one side or just part of the body, or only on a few areas of the body. Vitiligo can spread slowly, rapidly or not at all. Less than one percent of those with vitiligo eventually have universal vitiligo, characterized by having 80% or more coverage of vitiligo on the skin.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF VITILIGO?

While white patches on the skin are the only physical result of vitiligo, there are side effects for people living with the condition. Vitiligo patches tend to burn more easily, making it difficult for those with the condition to spend time in the sun. Many who live with vitiligo experience social anxiety and difficulty coping emotionally, resulting in lowered self-esteem and depression.

IS THERE A CURE FOR VITILIGO?

No, there is not a cure for vitiligo because the actual cause is unknown. There are treatments that can help to restore skin color, but results vary, are unpredictable and can have serious side effects. Current treatments include creams that control inflammation, medications, light therapy, laser therapy, skin grafting and depigmentation.

IS VITILIGO CONTAGIOUS?

No, it is not contagious because it is a genetic disease.

WHAT RESEARCH IS BEING DONE ON VITILIGO?

There is more research being conducted today on vitiligo than ever before. Current research is investigating how trauma and stress trigger vitiligo; new treatments and better understanding of the condition; genes that may cause or contribute to vitiligo; and analysis of genes already linked to vitiligo.

WHO MIGHT I KNOW WHO HAS VITILIGO?

Michael Jackson is the most iconic figure to have vitiligo as the condition was responsible for his skin transformation. Most recently, model Winnie Harlow became known for the condition after appearing on America's Next Top Model.

HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE IT?

To hear it correctly, say the words "little I go." Then replace the first "L" with a "V" – giving you "Vittle I Go." Run the words together and you can the correct pronunciation.

Sources:

<https://www.vitigosupport.org/faq.cfm>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/vitiligo/basics/definition/con-20032007>

http://www.niams.nih.gov/health_info/vitiligo/vitiligo_ff.asp