

This is an unappealing yet harmless skin disorder characterised by white patches of skin that have seemingly lost their ability to produce the normal colour of the skin.

What to look for

- White patches of skin usually on exposed areas of the body- can occur symmetrically.
- Hair may go grey in patches.

Usually this disorder occurs before the age of 20. It can come and go or lay dormant for year. It is usually stress related.

The onset of the loss of pigmentation varies in different people, one person may lose all their pigmentation, while another may only have a few spots of lost colour.

Vitiligo is not dangerous, but it is sometimes linked with other diseases or disorders such as thyroid problems, pernicious anaemia, Addison's disease (decreased adrenal gland function), and alopecia areata (hair loss in patches).

Causes

It is not known what causes vitiligo, although it is suspected that it is hereditary. Emotional stress may be the onset of vitiligo.

In essence what happens in the body is that the cells stop producing melanin which gives the skin and hair its colour. There are several possibilities one is that this is an autoimmune disease in which the cells attack their own cells, perceiving them as foreign. The problem can cause distress and embarrassment and can affect people's self esteem.

Traditional Treatment

There are treatments you can receive from your doctor that can draw the pigment to the cells.

The doctors can try to help the normal pigmentation or to depigment the rest of the body so that it matches. The options are available for you to discuss with your doctor.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

- Certain Homoeopathic treatments have often had very good results.
- Some positive results from the use of the substance - Para Aminobenzoic Acid (PABA).
- Some experts say that vitiligo may be the result of a copper deficiency.

When to seek further professional advice

- if you find the condition is severely affecting your feelings about yourself and your social life.