

Vitiligo

This is a long lasting skin disease. In vitiligo, some areas of the skin loses its normal pigmentation and attain a white (depigmented) or pink color.

The disease affects all age groups. The speed of spread and the percentage of the skin affected vary from person to person. Generally, it spreads very slowly. Vitiligo is not infectious.

1. How does vitiligo occur?

There is selective destruction of cells that produce the pigmentation of our skin (melanocytes). The cause of this destruction is not known, but believed to be due to our immune system attacking on the melanocytes. There is no relationship between vitiligo and food you take.

2. What are the characteristics of vitiligo?

Vitiligo very rarely has a genetic background. Majority of the vitiligo patients do not have a genetic background. Therefore, even if you have vitiligo, your children may not be affected by the disease.

Vitiligo commonly affects hands, feet, skin around the mouth, groin and armpits. There is a tendency for vitiligo to occur on previous scars and sites of injuries.

3. Is vitiligo treatable?

There are various treatment modalities available in forms of

- Topical applications
- Oral tablets or capsules
- Ultraviolet radiation
- Skin grafting
- Camouflage techniques

The effectiveness of these individual treatment in achieving disease control will vary from person to person. Therefore, treatment modalities and duration will also vary from one person to another.

Generally, vitiligo requires long term treatments to cure or to control the disease process.

Since each and every treatment methods may have their own side effects, treatment should only be carried out under the supervision of a qualified doctor.

Since patches of vitiligo may itch or burn when exposed to sunlight, it is important to protect your skin from sunlight as much as possible.

4. How to protect your skin from sunlight?

Use a wide brimmed hat or umbrella (black) to cover your face and ears.

To cover vitiligo patches on hands and feet, use long sleeved dresses. You can select dresses made with thicker fabric to cover these areas.

Avoid outdoor activities as much as possible during the hours of maximum sunlight (from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.)

Use a sunscreen of SPF value more than 30. Apply it on your skin 20- 30 min before sun exposure and reapply every 2 hours if you stay longer periods in the sun.

