



"One day, they started  
spreading from my  
hands to my face"

"Till today  
I cover them up  
with makeup"

"They called  
me a cow"

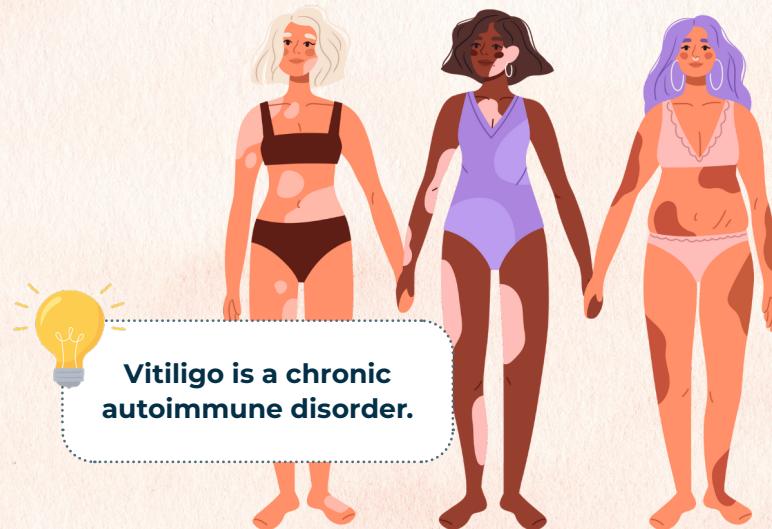
# every PATCH has a story

**Don't Suffer with  
Vitiligo Alone.**



# What is Vitiligo?

Vitiligo (also known as leucoderma or white spot syndrome) is a chronic skin disorder in which the immune system mistakenly attacks its own melanocytes as foreign invaders, leading to reduction in pigment in the affected areas and appearance of abnormally pale patches or white spots on the skin.<sup>1</sup>



Vitiligo affects approximately 0.7% of the population in Singaporean<sup>2</sup>.

People may suffer from vitiligo at any age and nearly 50% of the patients develop symptoms before the age of 20<sup>3</sup>.

Although vitiligo is neither life-threatening nor contagious, the uneven skin tone may affect patients' appearances and cause distress to them.



# How does Vitiligo develop? <sup>4,5</sup>

Vitiligo initially appears as patches on the skin with colour lighter than the normal skin tone and then gradually turns white. These patches have a white centre surrounded by a lighter skin tone, with edges that may be smooth, irregular or sharply-defined. The symptoms of vitiligo vary from person from person—some may develop only a few white spots, while others may have extensive white patches.

Vitiligo can be mainly classified into two major types: non-segmental and segmental, of which the non-segmental type is the most common.



## Non-segmental vitiligo

Patients typically develop symmetrical symptoms on both sides of the body, with the depigmented area possibly appearing on both knees or hands. The depigmented area initially may be small but tend to spread, usually covering larger areas of skin over time. The main differences between segmental and non-segmental vitiligo are the pattern and progression of depigmentation.



## Segmental vitiligo

This type is also known as unilateral vitiligo. Patients often observe rapid depigmentation on one side of the body. Segmental vitiligo tends to stabilize after 6 to 12 months, and the depigmentation stops. Once it stops, most patients with this type of vitiligo do not develop new patches or spots.

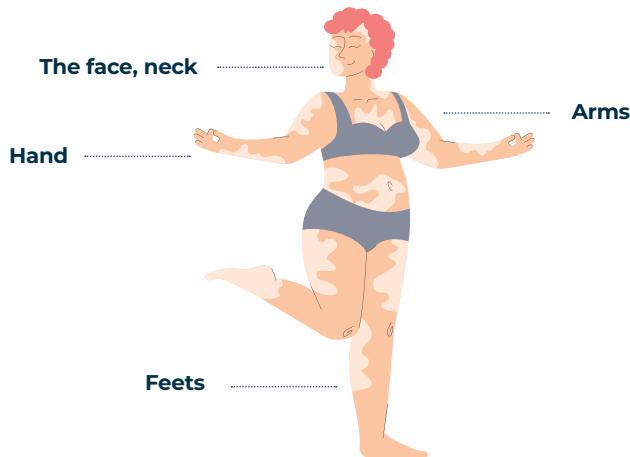


Segmental vitiligo and non-segmental vitiligo have different causes. It is believed that segmental vitiligo is associated with the dysfunction of the sympathetic nervous system.



# Which areas of the body are most commonly affected by Vitiligo?<sup>6</sup>

Vitiligo can occur on any part of human skin. The depigmented patches usually appear on:



The spots and patches may enlarge over time, and white patches can appear on different parts of the body

## Hair

Vitiligo can also affect hair, causing it to turn white or grey prematurely.

## Ears

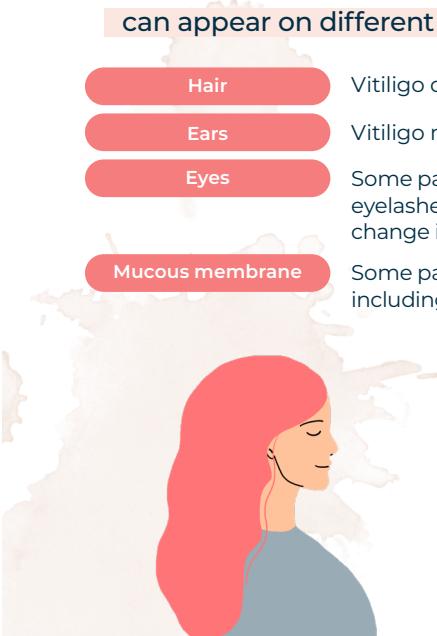
Vitiligo may also appear inside the ears of affected patients.

## Eyes

Some patients experience partial or complete depigmentation in their eyelashes or eyebrows. If vitiligo affects the eyes, it may also lead to a change in eye colour.

## Mucous membrane

Some patients may experience depigmentation of mucous membranes, including the oral cavity, nasal passages, and reproductive organs.





# What Populations are at risk for Vitiligo?<sup>7</sup>

Vitiligo can affect individuals of all races and skin tones, with practically equal incidence rate across all races. Approximately half of the patients develop symptoms before the age of 20, though vitiligo can also occur in both infants and the elderly.



## Is Vitiligo hereditary?<sup>7</sup>

While the exact cause of vitiligo remains unclear, several known factors may contribute to its development:

### Autoimmune Mechanism

Vitiligo is considered as an autoimmune disorder where the immune system mistakenly attacks melanocytes. Patients with other autoimmune disorders, thyroid disorders or alopecia areata/alopecia in particular, demonstrate increased susceptibility to vitiligo.

### Heredity Factor

Although vitiligo can run in families, it does not mean that all close relatives or children will develop it.

### Environmental Triggers

Stress, severe sunburn, skin lesion (laceration, abrasion, burn) and exposure to certain chemicals.

## Is Vitiligo merely a “cosmetic issue”?

Vitiligo, which causes the loss of skin's natural colour and visible changes in appearance, is often mistakenly regarded as merely a cosmetic concern. In fact, vitiligo is an autoimmune disorder in which the body's immune system mistakenly attacks melanocytes in the skin, hair, lips, inside the mouth, nasal passages, reproductive organs, rectum, eyes and inner ear, leading to loss of pigment in the skin and hair. In more severe cases, if the melanocytes in the inner ear are affected, the patient may experience some degree of hearing impairment. It is estimated that 12% to 38% of vitiligo patients experience hearing impairment to some degree.<sup>8</sup>



# What are the Symptoms of Vitiligo? <sup>6,9</sup>

The most evident symptom of vitiligo is the lightening of skin tone in one or multiple areas. For many patients, this is the sole symptom of vitiligo:

## Light-coloured Skin Spots and Patches

When suffering from vitiligo, the pigment-producing cells are damaged, resulting in light-coloured spots and patches on the skin. Vitiligo can appear anywhere on the patient's skin.



## Depigmentation Process

When vitiligo is in an active state, the patches often appear pink or light skin-toned. Once the white patches become inactive, they turn completely white.



## Sunburn

Melanin serves as the skin's natural defence against UV rays. In vitiligo, the loss of melanin leaves the depigmented areas more sensitive to sunlight, making it highly prone to sunburn. Sunburn may also trigger and worsen the spread of vitiligo. Therefore, sunblock is essential for vitiligo patients.



## Itching and Vitiligo

When vitiligo is actively spreading, patches may feel itchy. Otherwise, the spots and patches rarely cause discomfort.





## Impact on Hearing

Melanocytes are the cells responsible for giving colour to the skin, hair and eyes. These cells are also found in the inner ears. When a person suffers from vitiligo, the body's immune system attacks melanocytes. If the melanocytes in the inner ear are affected, hearing may be impaired.



## Impact on Eyesight

If the eyes are affected, the patient's eye colour may change. Though this is relatively rare, it may also affect the patient's eyesight. Some patients may experience changes in eyesight and abnormal tear secretion.



## Risks of Other Autoimmune Disorders

Vitiligo increases the risks of other autoimmune disorders, such as thyroid disorders and Alopecia Areata.



## Anxiety and Depression

The sudden onset of vitiligo can have a significant impact on patients' daily life, social interactions, work and even spousal relationships, thereby increasing the risk of mood disorders. This is especially true for women, who often placed greater importance on their appearance. Vitiligo can cause considerable psychological distress to them. Research shows that patients with vitiligo are approximately 5 times more likely to develop depression compared to those without the condition.



**If you suspect that you may have vitiligo, please seek medical treatment from a dermatologist as soon as possible.**

### What a dermatologist can do for you:

- Provide an accurate diagnosis
- Rule out the possibility of other skin diseases
- Identify the cause of white patches on the skin
- Offer personalised treatment options
- Monitor for signs of other diseases



# Diagnosis of Vitiligo<sup>3</sup>

## Skin Examination

A dermatologist usually will ask about your medical history and conduct a thorough examination. He or she may use a Wood's lamp (also known as a black light), which emits UV rays, to make the affected area more visible. A skin biopsy may also be performed for further confirmation.

## Blood Test

Blood tests can help determine whether the immune system is attacking healthy melanin-producing cells in the body. People with vitiligo have a higher risk of developing other autoimmune disorders, such as thyroid disorders. Blood tests can detect autoimmune disorders like thyroid disorders.

# Is there a Treatment for Vitiligo? <sup>10-12</sup>

Although vitiligo cannot be completely cured, various treatments can help slow the spread of white spots and patches, accelerate the regeneration of melanocytes, and increase the chances of restoring the lost skin tone.

{ *The earlier the treatment begins, the better the outcome is likely to be!* }

## Will the vitiligo-affected areas continue to spread?

The condition of vitiligo is unpredictable. In some cases, the white patches may stop spreading on their own, and 10% to 20% of patients even regain their normal skin tone spontaneously. However, in other cases, the white patches gradually enlarge or spread to other areas. The spread of white patches is more common in people with a family history of vitiligo or those who suffer from the condition for a prolonged period. Additionally, skin damage may also lead to the spread of white patches.

## Can vitiligo be prevented?

Currently, there is no proven method to prevent vitiligo. If you notice light-coloured spots or patches on the skin, please consult with a dermatologist instantly.



# Establish a Vitiligo Treatment Plan

Before starting any treatment plan, please consult a dermatologist first. After taking into the account of the patient's age, overall health condition and the impact of the condition on the patient's life, the dermatologist will develop a personalised treatment plan.

## Questions to ask the Dermatologist during Face-to-face Consultation

How are short-term and long-term treatment goals established? Are the aims to restore lost skin tone, stop existing spots and patches from getting larger, or prevent the emergence of new spots?

What alternative treatments are available if the medication is not effective?

Discuss with the dermatologist about which medication(s) to prescribe.

What should I look out for when using any medication?

Would the new type of topical JAK inhibitor be a suitable treatment option for my condition?

What are the side effects of such medication(s)?

When can I expect to see results from the medication?





# Treatment Approaches for Vitiligo <sup>12</sup>

The dermatologist will choose the most suitable treatment approach and combination for patients with vitiligo, based on the severity of the condition and the anticipated therapeutic effect.

## Common Traditional Treatments

<b>Topical Steroid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Apply the topical ointment to areas affected by vitiligo, usually used for smaller patches</li><li>Treatment usually takes about 3 to 6 months to potentially improve the skin tone</li><li>Prolonged use may cause side effects, such as thinning of the skin and visible small blood vessels (telangiectasia)</li></ul>
<b>Topical Calcineurin Inhibitor (TCI)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Non-steroidal topical medications, mainly used on the face and neck</li><li>Since they don't contain steroids, TCIs are relatively milder and safer, and free from the side effect of skin thinning that steroids may have, and can be used for longer periods</li><li>One of the most common side effects is a burning or stinging sensation when first applied</li></ul>
<b>UV Light Therapy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>For instance, UVB therapy can be used for extensive white patches or patients who do not respond to topical medications</li><li>Treatment is usually done twice a week for patients, and it can take around 3 to 6 months to start seeing improvement</li><li>The UV light therapy should be continued for at least 1 year</li></ul>
<b>Melanocytes Transplant Surgery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Extract melanin and epidermal cells from skin with normal black colour, and transplant them onto vitiligo-affected skin</li><li>Usually used for smaller white patches</li><li>Surgical sites may get infected and scarred</li></ul>
<b>Depigmentation Treatment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A relatively rare treatment method</li><li>Used for patients with severe vitiligo that affects nearly the whole body. Apply chemicals to permanently remove the only remaining normal skin pigment</li></ul>





## The Latest Breakthrough in Vitiligo Treatment: A Light at the End of the Tunnel?

An online questionnaire of 1,662 patients with vitiligo indicates that, regardless of treatment effectiveness, patients tend to prefer safer treatment approaches and report low satisfaction with their current treatment plans<sup>13</sup>. This may be due to the lack of targeted therapies, leading to limited effectiveness and unwanted side effects. With the growing attention and increasing number of pathological researches and findings of vitiligo, more innovative treatments have emerged. Among these, targeted therapies such as topical JAK inhibitors, are likely to be the major trend in future treatment development.

{ Patience is the Key to Successful Treatment }

If patients have any questions, they should consult their attending physician and select a treatment plan that best suits their individual condition.



# Self-care Tips for Patients with Vitiligo<sup>14</sup>

## 1. Take adequate sun protection measures

- Shield your skin from sun exposure, as severe sunburn can worsen vitiligo.
- When the skin is not tanned, lighter spots and patches are usually less noticeable.
- Wear sun-protective clothing that can protect the skin from sunlight exposure. Appropriate clothing is one of the best methods to protect the skin from harmful rays of the sun.
- Apply a water-resistant sunscreen with at least SPF30 to all skin not covered by clothing when going out daily.
- If you have a darker skin tone, consider using a tinted sunscreen.
- To ensure effectiveness, apply sunscreen at least 15 minutes before going outdoors.
- Reapply the sunscreen every two hours when you are outdoors, after staying in the water for a period or when sweating.
- Use hats and clothes to shield the depigmented skin from sunlight.
- Do not use a sunlamp on your own, always follow your dermatologist's advice.





# Self-care Tips for Patients with Vitiligo<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Avoid tattoo or laceration

- Avoid lacerations, abrasions and burns. Skin damage may lead to new spots or patches. Try to avoid harming the skin as much as possible.
- Getting a tattoo can do harm to the skin, and may cause new white patches on the injured area.

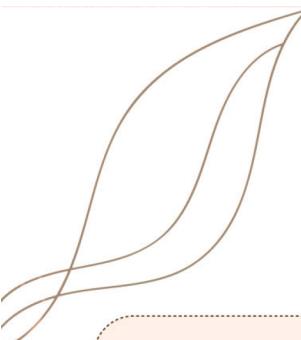
## 3. Dermatologist-Patient Communication

- Keep a record of your condition, pay attention to the side effects of the medication and its impacts on your life, and communicate well with the dermatologist and ask questions proactively.
- If you feel frustrated or embarrassed because of changes in the appearance, please let the dermatologist know. He or she may suggest psychological counseling or joining patient organisations.

## 4. Self-emotional Care of Patients

- Encourage participation in activities organised by patient support groups to gain mutual support from peers.
- Learn more about and make good use of available social resources and self-help tools.
- Share feelings with family and friends to receive emotional support and build understanding.
- Try meditation, deep breathing or exercise to help alleviate anxiety and stress.
- Recognise that everyone has unique qualities and learn to accept and embrace yourself
- Understand that negative emotions are normal, and allow yourself to feel these emotions and regard them as opportunities for self-reflection and growth.



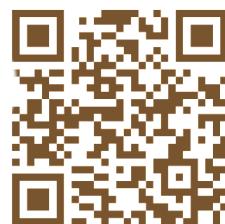


# Vitiligo Support Group

At Vitiligo Support Group (VSG), we believe that your story matters. We are a community-driven initiative dedicated to supporting individuals with vitiligo by offering a safe space to connect, learn, and grow.

Through peer support, education, and awareness campaigns, we aim to break stigma, celebrate confidence, and build a movement of self-love. Whether you're newly diagnosed or have been living with vitiligo for years, you're not alone—we're stronger together.

Join VSG to get more information about upcoming educational events and resources.





# Vitiligo Support Group

1. The content of this pamphlet is for reference only and cannot replace the doctor/dermatologist's advice or the need for medical treatment, nor can it be used as a basis for self-diagnosis or treatment option. If you have any questions about the disease, medication or treatment methods, please consult a doctor/dermatologist or healthcare professional.
2. Vitiligo Support Group does not favour or recommend any medication or product. If you have any questions about the relevant medications or products, please consult the doctor or medical worker directly.
3. Vitiligo Support Group shall not be held responsible for any loss or liability caused by the content of this pamphlet.
4. The content of this pamphlet is based on the information as of June 2025. Any changes to the information or data will be subject to latest published information.

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