

TINEA VERSICOLOR

Tinea versicolor, also called pityriasis versicolor, is a common skin condition. It is caused by an interaction of a common inhabitant of the skin and humidity. In dry climates only 2% have the condition whereas in tropical climates up to 50% have the condition. *Malassezia furfur* is the name of the yeast found in the skin of this condition, but almost everyone has some *Malassezia furfur* on his or her skin, so this isn't the whole story. The yeast is found in most people as a spore form, but when it causes this skin condition it changes to a filamentous (hyphal) form, hence some people call this a fungal infection.



Antifungal creams, lotions or shampoos can help treat tinea versicolor. But even after successful treatment, skin color may remain uneven for several weeks, and the infection usually returns. We have not yet found the way to alter a person's chemistry so that the yeast keeps out of trouble!

Sufferers do not have more of the yeast than other people – they are just more sensitive to it. *Malassezia furfur* is found in 18% of infants and 90-100% of adults. And oddly enough, it is usually teenagers who notice a skin condition from it. The yeast grows slowly and prevents the skin from tanning normally. As the rest of the skin tans in the sun, the pale spots, which are affected by the yeast, become more noticeable, with colors ranging from white to pink to red to tan to brown. Tinea versicolor usually produces few symptoms. Occasionally, there is some slight itching that is more intense when a person gets hot and sweaty.

The following measures may help your skin return to normal. Avoid applying oil or oily products to your skin or wearing tight, restrictive or non-ventilated clothing. Sun exposure makes the fungal infection more apparent, and yet a mild suntan frequently helps the skin improve. Most fungal infections respond well to these topical agents, which include:

- Selenium sulfide shampoo (Selsun Blue)
- Miconazole (Micatin)
- Clotrimazole (Lotrimin)
- Ketoconazole (Nizoral)
- Terbinafine (Lamisil)

If your tinea versicolor is severe or doesn't respond to over-the-counter antifungal medicine, you may need a prescription-strength topical or oral medication.

- Ciclopirox (Loprox) cream, gel or lotion
- Itraconazole (Sporanox) capsules
- Fluconazole (Diflucan) tablets

Even after successful treatment, your skin color may remain uneven for several weeks, or even months. Also, the infection may return in warm, humid weather. In persistent cases, you may need to take a medication once or twice a month to prevent the infection from recurring.

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Caring Family, SC 815 459-2200 www.caringfamilysc.com

Todd S. Giese, M.D. Racquel N. Ramirez, M.D. George B. Gancayco, M.D. Jamie T. M. Gancayco, M.D.