

# Tinea Versicolor

Tinea versicolor (also known as pityriasis versicolor) is a type of fungal infection caused by an overgrowth of yeast on the skin. The yeast interferes with the normal pigmentation (colour) of the skin, causing small spots or patches of discoloured skin. Tinea versicolor can develop at any age but is more common in teenagers and young adults. It affects people of all skin colours, particularly those who live in tropical or subtropical areas of the world.

## What does tinea versicolor look like?

The first sign of tinea versicolor is often a rash of spots on the skin. As the yeast infection spreads the spots may combine to form patches. The patches of affected skin can appear lighter or darker in colour than the surrounding skin, and may be mildly itchy. Paler patches may be more common in people with darker skin and are less likely to itch. Sometimes the patches begin as scaly brown areas that become whiter as they heal. Spots often become more noticeable with sun exposure or tanning, and may disappear in cooler weather. The condition can affect any part of the body but is most often seen on the shoulders, chest and back.

## What causes tinea versicolor?

Tinea versicolor is caused by an overgrowth of yeast (a type of fungus) on the skin. Everyone has yeast growing on their skin, but when it grows too much it can affect the pigment and cause tinea versicolor. Yeast on the skin may overgrow if you are exposed to hot, humid weather or if you sweat a lot, have oily skin or a weakened immune system. People who live in tropical or subtropical climates may have a recurrence of the condition every year, especially during spring.

## How is tinea versicolor diagnosed?

A dermatologist can diagnose tinea versicolor by the appearance of the spots or patches on your skin. They may confirm the diagnosis by taking a scraping of affected skin (a biopsy) and examining it under a microscope. Your dermatologist may also use a special ultraviolet lamp (called a Wood's light) to examine the skin. Tinea versicolor appears as a yellow-greenish colour when the skin is examined with this lamp.

## What else can I do about tinea versicolor?

You may help skin colour to return to normal by minimising sun exposure and avoiding tanning. It may also be beneficial to wear loose clothing and avoid using skin care products that are oily.

## Treatment

Antifungal creams, soaps, lotions or shampoos can be used to keep the yeast under control. However, tinea versicolor often returns, especially in warm, humid weather. It can be helpful to use an antifungal skin cleanser once or twice a month to prevent another overgrowth of yeast on the skin. Skin may stay lighter or darker for several weeks or months before returning to its normal colour.

Your dermatologist may also prescribe a short course of antifungal pills if the condition is widespread and covers a large amount of skin, or if the condition recurs after other treatments.