

Tinea Versicolor

Tinea versicolor is one of the most common skin conditions seen in dermatology. The word *tinea* is used to describe skin infections caused by fungus, while *versicolor* means 'of diverse colors'. So as the name suggests, *tinea versicolor* is a skin condition caused by a type of fungus which can temporarily cause the skin to change in color.

The interesting thing about the fungus which causes *tinea versicolor* is that it's naturally present on nearly everyone's skin. In small numbers, it's impossible to know it's even there. For unknown reasons, though, the chemistry of some people's skin is simply more conducive to allowing its overproduction.

It's the byproducts of this fungus which temporarily affect the skin tone. For most patients, the result is the formation whitish-pink patches concentrated primarily on the chest, back and abdomen. Rather than lighter skin, some will actually experience a darkening of skin color instead. The reason the chest, back and abdomen are most often affected is because the fungus (usually of the genus *Malassezia*) generally prefers the 'oil-prone' areas of body, though the arms and legs are occasionally affected as well.

It's important to know that **the changes of skin tone occurring in *tinea versicolor* are temporary**. After treatment, the pigment process within affected skin will return to normal function – typically within several weeks.

TREATMENT

Because *Malassezia* is naturally present on our skin, the goal with treatment is not to completely eradicate it, as doing so is essentially impossible. Instead, the objective is to simply decrease its numbers back to more balanced levels. To do this, both topical medications as well as pills are available. Your dermatologist will provide you with a treatment plan based on your specific needs.

Finally, it's worth knowing that it's normal for *tinea versicolor* to occasionally recur in prone individuals. If you experience repeated flares throughout the year, let your dermatologist know, as certain measures (such as antifungal cleansers) can be helpful in preventing frequent recurrences.