

# Tinea Versicolor

## Introduction

Tinea versicolor is a common skin condition due to overgrowth of a skin surface yeast. This overgrowth results in uneven skin color and scaling that can be unsightly and sometimes itchy. The yeast normally lives in the pores of the skin and thrives in oily areas such as the neck, upper chest, and back.

## What does tinea versicolor look like and how do you recognize it?

Tinea versicolor has small, scaly white-to-pink or tan-to-dark spots which can be scattered over the upper arms, chest and back. They may sometimes appear on the neck and the face. On light skin, tinea versicolor may be faint or can appear as tan-to-pink spots, while on dark skin tinea versicolor may be light or dark. The fungus 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, especially on dark skin.

## What are the symptoms?

Tinea versicolor usually produces few symptoms. Occasionally, there is some slight itching that is more intense when a person gets hot.

## Who may get this rash?

Most people get tinea versicolor when they are teenagers or young adults. It is rare in the elderly and children, except in tropical climates where it can occur at any age. Both dark and light skinned people are equally prone to its development. People with oily skin may be more susceptible than those with naturally dry skin.

The yeast is normally present in small numbers on everyone's skin. Anyone can develop an overgrowth of yeast. During the summer months when the temperature and humidity are high, the yeast can increase. The excess yeast on the skin prevents the normal pigmentation process, resulting in light and dark spots. In tropical countries with continuous high heat and high humidity, people can have these spots year round. In other climates, the spots generally fade in the cooler and drier months of the year. Why some people get tinea versicolor and others do not is unclear.

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## How is tinea versicolor diagnosed?

Although the light or dark colored spots can resemble other skin conditions, tinea versicolor can be easily recognized by a dermatologist. In most cases, the appearance of the skin is diagnostic, but a simple examination of the fine scales scraped from the skin can confirm the diagnosis. Scales are lightly scraped onto a slide and examined under a microscope for the presence of the yeast. A special light may help to make the diagnosis by showing a yellow green color where the skin is affected.

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## **How is it treated?**

Tinea versicolor is treated with topical or oral medications. Topical treatment includes special cleansers including some shampoos, creams, or lotions applied directly to the skin.

Several oral medications have been used successfully to treat tinea versicolor. Because of possible side effects, or interactions with other medications, the use of these prescription medicines should be supervised by your dermatologist. After any form of treatment, the uneven color of the skin may remain several months after the yeast has been eliminated until the skin repigments normally.

Tinea versicolor may recur. Special cleansers may decrease episodes when used once or twice a month, especially during warm humid months of the year.

Each patient is treated by the dermatologist according to the severity and location of the disease, the climate, and the desire of the patient. It's important to remember that the yeast is easy to kill, but it can take weeks or months for the skin to regain its normal color.