

Vitiligo

Overview:

- **Vitiligo is a skin condition that causes white patches on the skin.**
- Vitiligo is generally thought to be caused by the immune system attacking the skin cells that give it its color.
- Why some people develop vitiligo and others don't is unknown, although in some cases it is hereditary.
- Vitiligo does not cause any internal problems, although it can be associated with thyroid problems in some cases.
- Vitiligo is not contagious.
- Areas of vitiligo on the skin lack melanin, which is the skin's way of protecting itself from damage from the sun. Thus, areas of vitiligo should be protected from sun exposure by clothing or by using a good sunscreen.

Treatment:

- In general, vitiligo is a lifelong disease. There is treatment, but no known cure.
- Treatment of vitiligo is difficult. Classically, the most common treatment was topical steroids, although these can cause thinning of the skin, especially in skin on the face, neck, under the arms or in the genital area.
- One treatment which has become more popular over the past few years is to use creams called calcineurin inhibitors: Protopic (tacrolimus) ointment and Elidel (pimecrolimus) cream. These medications are typically used for eczema, but they have been found to be quite helpful in vitiligo. The main advantage over topical steroids is that they do not cause thinning of the skin.
- Vitiligo responds best to treatment when it is on the face and neck, and less well when it is on the hands and feet.
- Another treatment that is used in vitiligo is phototherapy. With this treatment, patients come to the office and stand in a large box that emits ultraviolet light. For vitiligo, this treatment needs to be done for months, sometimes years.
- There are specific types of makeup that can be used to cover up vitiligo in cosmetically sensitive areas. There is information available on the Internet in regard to this; you also may consider making an appointment with our aesthetician to discuss this.