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## Dermatology Patient Education

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# Skin of Color

There are a variety of skin, hair and nail conditions that are common in people with skin of color such as African Americans, Asians, Latinos and Native Americans. Your dermatologist can help diagnose and treat these skin conditions.

### SKIN CONDITIONS

#### Postinflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH)

This condition results in patches of darker skin as your skin heals after a cut or scrape, or when acne, eczema or other rashes clear. PIH often fades, but the darker the PIH, the longer fading can take.

Your dermatologist can help restore your skin's color more quickly. Prescription medicines containing retinoids or hydroquinone (a bleaching ingredient), and procedures such as chemical peels and microdermabrasion may help. Your dermatologist will also encourage you to wear sunscreen to avoid further darkening of the skin due to ultraviolet (UV) light exposure and prevent further PIH from developing.

Treatment products available over-the-counter rarely help and can make PIH more noticeable.

#### Melasma

This common condition causes brown to gray-brown patches, usually on the face. It occurs most often in women who have Latina, African, or Asian ancestry. Men can get melasma, too.

Melasma can also appear on other parts of the body that get lots of sun exposure, such as the forearms and neck. Melasma may be associated with pregnancy, birth control pills or estrogen replacement therapy. It may also be hereditary.

Melasma can fade on its own, but it often recurs. Your dermatologist can provide prescription topical treatment to help the condition fade. Procedures including chemical peels and microdermabrasion can also help.

If you have melasma, protecting your skin from the sun is very important. Seek shade, wear protective clothing and apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.

#### Vitiligo

Vitiligo is a condition that causes the skin to lose color. Some people develop a few spots that lighten or turn completely white. Others have more widespread color loss. Vitiligo can develop on any part of the body. Sometimes, it also causes a patch of hair to turn white.

Skin color may return on its own but that is not common. For many people, however, the color loss can be permanent if not treated.



Vitiligo

Treatment cannot cure vitiligo, but it can help repigment the skin. The treatment that your dermatologist recommends depends on many factors. Some treatments work best on certain types of vitiligo or certain areas of the body. Your dermatologist also considers how much of your skin is affected, your age, and general health.

### **Pityriasis alba**

This is a common skin condition in children with skin of color. It causes round, light patches of skin that are covered with fine white scale. The patches can occur on any part of the body, but are most likely to develop on the face, neck, trunk, or arms.

The patches often go away without treatment. Most children no longer have patches by the time they become an adult. Your dermatologist can determine if treatment would benefit this condition. They also may recommend applying moisturizer to the skin and sun protection.

**Of note:** Taking certain medicines can cause skin discoloration, especially in people of African or Latino descent. These medicines include those taken for high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.

If you take medicine and notice discoloration, talk with your doctor who prescribed the medicine. You should not stop taking a medicine without talking with your doctor.

## **SCALP CONDITIONS**

### **Pomade acne**

If you apply pomade or hair oil to your scalp regularly, you may notice pimples along your forehead. This is often called “pomade acne” and occurs when the pomade or oil spreads onto the forehead.

To treat pomade acne, stop using the product. Also try applying the pomade further back from your hairline, at least one inch from the hairline. If you wear a headscarf at bed, make sure it is not contacting the forehead, as this can spread oils onto the skin, and worsen acne on the forehead.

If changing your application process with these products does not clear your skin, your dermatologist can provide additional treatment options.



Pomade acne

### **Seborrhea**

Seborrhea usually begins on the scalp as oily, itchy, waxy patches. It can spread to the face and along the neck and shoulders.

Using pomade or hair oil can worsen seborrhea, so stop using the product. Also, washing the hair at least twice a week helps.

### **Folliculitis**

This is a bacterial infection that causes pus-filled bumps and red, itchy skin on the scalp.

Pomades can cause folliculitis. Since this is an infection, you should stop using pomade and see your dermatologist. You may be prescribed antibiotics or topical skin treatments.

### **Tinea capitis (scalp ringworm)**

This disease causes bald, itchy patches of skin or flaking similar to dandruff on the scalp. Despite the name, worms do not cause this condition. It is actually a skin infection caused by fungus.

This is a very common condition in African American and Latino children. Children can quickly spread scalp ringworm to everyone in their household and to their classmates. Sharing combs, brushes, and hats can spread the disease. Close contact also spreads scalp ringworm.

It is important to see a dermatologist for treatment. Your dermatologist may treat scalp ringworm with a prescription anti-fungal medicine that is taken by mouth. With the right treatment, any hair that is lost will often grow back in time.

## SKIN CONDITIONS DUE TO SHAVING

### Pseudofolliculitis barbae

Occurring most often on the face and neck, this condition is caused the structure of the hair follicle in African American men and women. The hair follicle is curved in people with skin of color and when you shave, it can cause the sharp tip of shaved hair to grow back into the skin resulting in a raised, red bump. This can also occur when a hair is tweezed from the face.



Pseudofolliculitis barbae

### Acne keloidalis

Small, firm, bumps that may enlarge into large scars called keloids. These occur in men who shave their scalp or cut their hair very short at the nape of their neck. Women also can get acne keloidalis, but much less frequently. Without treatment, this skin condition can cause hair loss.

Your dermatologist can prescribe medicine to treat skin problems caused by shaving and tweezing.

To prevent new bumps from either of these conditions, you may need to change how you remove unwanted hair. Some men choose to let the hair grow or shave less often.

If this is not an option, talk with your dermatologist about laser hair removal. You also can ask for tips for shaving that can reduce skin irritation and about a prescription cream that can slow the growth of facial hair.

## OTHER COMMON SKIN CONDITIONS

### Dry skin

Everyone occasionally gets dry skin. People with skin of color often see their skin turn an ashy color. Applying moisturizer every day can help.

If you have acne on your face or body, you should select a moisturizer that reads non-comedogenic on the label. This means it won't clog pores and should not worsen acne. However, if your acne worsens or new acne appears, stop using the moisturizer and see your dermatologist.

### Dermatosis papulosa nigra

Dermatosis papulosa nigra (DPN) causes clusters of brown or black growths most commonly on the cheeks. Many people mistake DPN for moles or warts and refer to these growths as "fleshy moles." DPN is a type of seborrheic keratosis, a non-cancerous skin growth.

DPN is most common in African American women, though women with other skin colors can develop them too.

If you do not like the appearance of DPN, your dermatologist can remove them. Check with your insurance carrier to be sure treatment is covered by your health insurance. Treatment options include surgically cutting out the growths

or burning them off with an electric needle. This treatment can cause temporarily discolored skin where the DPN was removed, but this usually fades quickly.

### **Keloids**

A keloid is a raised scar that grows beyond its border. Keloids often become extremely thick, rubbery, and large. A keloid may form after a skin injury such as a deep cut or other wound. Some people develop a keloid after surgery. Keloids can even form after getting your ears pierced or from an old acne spot. Some keloids itch. They can even be tender and painful.

Treatment may not get rid of the scar, but it can reduce discomfort and the size of the scar. Your dermatologist can treat keloids with corticosteroid shots to soften and flatten the scar, or shots of interferon to make the keloid smoother. Your dermatologist may also recommend scar surgery, laser treatments or cryotherapy (freezing the scar) to help shrink keloids. A combination of treatments often produces the best result.



Keloids

### **Skin cancer**

People with skin of color can get skin cancer. When skin cancer is diagnosed in people of color, it's often in a late stage. Treatment for any type of skin cancer can be difficult in the late stages. This can also be deadly if you are diagnosed with melanoma, a type of skin cancer that can spread quickly.

Dermatologists recommend that everyone examine their skin for signs of skin cancer. People with skin of color should pay special attention to the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, the fingernails, toenails, mouth, groin and buttocks. Visit [SpotSkinCancer.org](http://SpotSkinCancer.org) to learn how to perform a skin self-exam and what to look for on your skin. If you see a new spot or notice something changing, itching or bleeding on your skin, see your dermatologist right away.

### **NAIL CONCERNS**

People with skin of color often have dark streaks or bands on their fingernails and toenails. Most are harmless. However, if you see any of these changes to your nails, you should see your dermatologist:

- Skin around the base of a nail gets progressively darker
- The size, shape, or color of an existing band changes
- A new, single dark band

These could be signs of melanoma. When detected early, melanoma is highly treatable.

### **HAIR CONCERNS**

For people with African skin color, your hair may be tightly curled. You may notice that combing, especially with a hot comb, causes hair breakage (often called central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia). In addition, some of your styling practices, such as tight braiding (often called traction alopecia), can result in hair loss.

If you notice your hair falling out or breaking off, dermatologists recommend the following tips:

- If you use a hair straightener, follow the package directions. Most products do not cause problems when used as directed.
- Do less brushing and backcombing
- Use heat styling tools less often
- Loosen a tight hairstyle



Pseudofolliculitis barbae

If these tips do not help, talk with your dermatologist. By examining your hair and talking with you about how you style your hair, your dermatologist can offer hair loss treatments or more individualized tips.

A board-certified dermatologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating the medical, surgical, and cosmetic conditions of the skin, hair and nails. To learn more or find a dermatologist in your area, visit [aad.org](http://aad.org) or call toll free (888) 462-DERM (3376).

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