

IDIOPATHIC GUTTATE HYPOMELANOSIS

Idiopathic guttate hypomelanosis (IGH) is a condition which produces small, white patches on the skin. It is a benign condition. "Idiopathic" means that the cause is unknown. "Guttate" means resembling raindrops. "Hypomelanosis" refers to the light color of the affected areas. Although most often found on the shins and sun-exposed parts of the forearms, guttate hypomelanosis may also arise on other sun-exposed areas including the face, neck, and shoulders. The white spots are generally small (less than a pencil eraser tip) and are usually smooth. They may be slightly scaly.

IGH appears to be related to the effect of sun exposure and age on the number and function of pigment-producing cells of the skin (melanocytes). Idiopathic guttate hypomelanosis does not appear to be due to trauma or viral infection. It is not a sign of an internal problem. It is not vitiligo. It is not a sign of a cancer or any contagious skin problem.

Treatment is usually not required as the marks are completely harmless. Attempts to destroy the lesions may leave brown marks or larger white marks, which often look worse than the original condition. Sun protection with sunscreens or sunblocks is important to prevent sunburn in the lighter areas. Avoiding tanning beds is best.

Treatment is often designed to hide the marks rather than remove them. This can be accomplished with artificial tanning creams containing dihydroxyacetone or various cover up type make-up. Surgical techniques such as freezing, dermabrasion or microdermabrasion are not recommended.

Once again, IGH is a benign condition. Treatment is usually not needed. If you have any questions please ask before you leave the office.

