

TINEA VERSICOLOR

What causes tinea versicolor?

Tinea versicolor is a harmless skin disorder caused by a yeast living on normal skin. Usually this yeast - which all of us have on our skin - grows sparsely and is not visible. In some individuals it grows more actively. Why this happens is not known. The active growing of this yeast causes the slightly scaling patches on the trunk, neck, or arms known as tinea versicolor. On untanned skin tinea versicolor rash is a pink to coppery tan. On tanned skin the tinea versicolor patches are lighter, since tanning does not occur in the rash areas. The failure to tan is temporary; the skin tans normally after the rash has cleared up.

Tinea versicolor is not contagious. Tinea versicolor is more common in hot, humid climates and often comes back in the summertime.

Treatment

Treatment with prescription antifungal creams and lotions is effective in controlling the condition. These should be applied once a day at night for seven nights. Afterwards apply the medication once a week until the problem is entirely clear. Often the color changes in the skin take many weeks to months to fade back to normal.

Unfortunately, tinea versicolor - being caused by a normal skin inhabitant - tends to return. When it does, repeat the previously successful treatment. There are two creams available over the counter, which are effective in treating small patches of tinea versicolor. These two creams are miconazole 2% Cream (Micatin) and clotrimazole 1% Cream (Lotrimin AF). Either can be purchased without a prescription and be started if your rash returns.

In terms of preventing the tinea versicolor problem it is helpful to use a selenium sulfide containing shampoo once or twice a week. There are various manufacturers of selenium sulfide containing shampoos including Selsun Blue and Head & Shoulders. At the time that you wash your hair the lather is rubbed onto the back and chest and left on for a few minutes. It then can be immediately showered off. Using this shampoo therapy once per week may help prevent the problem from returning. If you notice small patches develop it will be best to use the above topical creams.

If you have any other questions regarding the tinea versicolor condition please ask me before you leave the office.