

This is a harmless, non-contagious, mild fungal infection of the skin. The fungus that causes this condition normally lives on everybody's skin in small numbers, but in young adults it occasionally grows profusely and causes a discolored rash. We do not know why this sudden growth and rash occurs, but it does not indicate that the person has low resistance or internal disease.

The name tinea versicolor means "fungus that changes colour". The rash may last for years, worsening and improving over the months. It often becomes more noticeable during the summer with sun exposure and tanning. Washing with regular soap will abolish the scaling of the rash for a few hours, but the rash itself cannot be washed away that easily. However, the fungus is on the surface of the skin, not in it, so treatment with medication that causes mild peeling of the top, dead skin layer will remove it.

The most commonly used medication is a dandruff shampoo (sometimes available only by prescription) such as Selsun or Exsel (Selsun Blue is weaker), which softens and removes the "dandruff" or top, dead layer of skin found on everyone. Apply the shampoo as a lotion thinly over the entire trunk from neck to waist and down the arm to the elbow. Put it on a generous margin of normal skin around the rash, just to be sure you get all the fungus. Leave it on a few hours or overnight, if you can, but remove it sooner if your skin begins to burn or itch. Then wash in a bath or shower, using more of the shampoo as a soap, and rub the area briskly with a facecloth to help remove the loosened dead skin. If you tend to have dry skin, apply a lubricating oil or lotion after bathing.

This treatment should be repeated once a week for 6 weeks. The ashy scale of the rash will disappear after a few treatments, but it may take months for your skin colour to return to normal. This slow return of colour is a normal healing process and does not mean that treatment has failed. The rash may return in months, and a repeat treatment may then be necessary. If the rash does not seem to respond well to this treatment or if it returns immediately after each treatment, return to your doctor for another type of medication.

You will outgrow this condition eventually, but usually it is easy to cure or keep under control. Your skin is not harmed or scarred by this infection, and you cannot give it to other people, so do not let tinea versicolor blemish your peace of mind.