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Unexplained White Spots on Your Skin Could Be Caused by Aging

By GERRIE SUMMERS. June 12, 2019



Many of us take great pains to make sure our skin is clear and pristine. (At Byrdie HQ, we've got the robust skincare regimens to prove it.) So, anytime something out of the ordinary pops up that we don't automatically know how to deal with, things can reach panic mode pretty quickly.

For example, age spots. And we're not just talking about dark sunspots; we've got a pretty good handle on those. We're talking little white spots, which can look a bit like confetti or white freckles. "It is a little-known fact that sun damage causes not only brown spots, but also white spots," says [Dr. Anna Guanche](#), board-certified dermatologist and celebrity beauty expert at Bella Skin Institute. "I liken them to 'gray hairs' in the skin."

More than likely, these are a result of a harmless condition called Idiopathic Guttate Hypomelanosis (IGH). "IGH is a skin condition characterized by multiple round [or] oval white spots that are usually flat. It is very commonly found on the arms and legs of patients over 50," says Dr. Marla Diakow of Schweiger Dermatology Group in Garden City, NY. "[It's] a completely benign entity, but often one of cosmetic concern to patients."

These white spots occur due to localized loss of pigmentation of the skin. Read on to get the full scoop on this condition and how it can be treated.

How to Treat IGH

If you begin to notice unexplained white spots, you should visit your dermatologist ASAP to rule out other conditions that have similar characteristics. If it turns out to be IGH, your dermatologist will definitely advise you get better about sun protection. "The use of broad-spectrum sunscreens and photo-protective clothing are recommended for prevention [of IGH]," Diakow says.



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The key word is prevention. "Once spots have formed, there are no universally effective treatments," Diakow says. "However, several modalities have been reported with limited success, including cryotherapy, intralesional steroid injections, topical retinoids, chemical peels, and lasers."

Guanche says, "For fairer skin types with sun damage and freckling [or] brown spots, photo facials or laser treatments to remove the surrounding excess pigmentation can make the white spots look less noticeable, due to less contrast."

Many of these treatments use therapeutic wounding of the lesions to stimulate melanocytes and thereby add pigment back to the spots. However, some of these therapies, such as chemical peels, can cause post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, so it's crucial that you consult your dermatologist first to determine what solution will work best for you.

The same goes for any home remedies, including topical application of fresh ginger, cabbage juice, or lime juice, and eating antioxidant-rich figs and walnuts. "There are no large-scale scientific studies showing that any of these ingredients are effective treatments. In particular, patients should avoid putting many of these, especially lime juice, on any sun-exposed areas of the skin to prevent worsening of pigmentation and irritation of the skin."

It's likely that no extreme measures need to be taken to treat IGH since the spots are benign. But Diakow advises, "If the lesions have any associated symptoms such as itching or pain, if they seem to be growing or spreading, or if they are raised and flaky, they should be evaluated by a dermatologist," Diakow says. "Light areas of skin on the face, back, or abdomen, and in a younger patient would be less likely to be IGH."

If It's Not IGH, Then What Could It Be?



"Other possible causes of white spots on the skin include fungal infection, autoimmune conditions, and post-inflammatory hypopigmentation," Diakow says. Though unrelated to IGH, some common issues that are also associated with white spots include the following:

Vitiligo: Loss of color in patches of skin

Pityriasis alba: Scaly patches of light pink or red skin, most common in children and young adults, and associated with eczema

Tinea versicolor: A fungal infection that results in patches of lighter or darker skin

Guanche says, "If white macules or spots are developing in non-sun-exposed areas, it would be important to be seen and get a definitive diagnosis."

The bottom line: White age spots on your skin are probably not any more concerning than your typical sunspots, but get to a dermatologist to make absolutely sure. And don't forget to slather on some sunscreen before you head out.

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