

Pityriasis Versicolor: Information and Treatment

Pityriasis versicolor is an infection of the skin caused by a yeast known as *Pityrosporum ovale* (p. ovale).

P. ovale is an organism that normally is found on parts of the skin that have active oil gland secretions. It is not known why some people have an overgrowth of this yeast, which can lead to discoloration, scaling and sometimes itching or thickening of the skin. The yeast interferes with normal pigmentation, which can cause light spots. Tanning of the normal skin around the infected areas can make the contrast even greater.

When the infection is treated, normal color will return to the skin, although it may take a long time to do so. Because *p. ovale* will continue to be present in the skin, infection may recur. In fact, about 60 percent of those who successfully treat a *p. ovale* infection will have another episode within two years.

Pityriasis versicolor is often worse in the summer because its growth increases with ultraviolet light, heat and moisture.

The infection is not especially contagious. However, you should be careful to wash your clothes regularly during treatment, as unlaundered clothing can cause re-infection.

Treatment:

P. ovale is extremely sensitive to a medication called Ketoconazole (Nizoral). Your Family Dermatology doctor will prescribe this for you in both oral and shampoo form.

Very little Nizoral is needed to treat *p. ovale*. You will take two tablets once per week. It is best to take the medication in the morning with food, preferably with an acidic juice or with a carbonated beverage. It is important that you not bathe or shower for several hours after taking Nizoral – the medicine works when it is secreted in your sweat. Showering too soon after taking the medication will reduce the effectiveness.

You will repeat this dosage once a week for three weeks (a total of six tablets), unless directed otherwise by your Family Dermatology doctor.

See the ketoconazole information page for more details on the medication and important precautions.

Use the Nizoral shampoo twice a week for the first four weeks of treatment. Lather it well into the scalp and over any body area where you suspect *p. ovale* is present. Rub with a wash cloth and rinse well. To help prevent re-infection, use the shampoo once per week for the next four weeks, and thereafter once a month for two more months.

If you suspect re-infection later, try re-treating with the shampoo. You may not need to use the oral medication.

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