

Albinism

What is albinism?

Albinism is an inherited condition where a person is unable to produce colouring of the skin, hair and eyes (lack of pigments). The condition can be limited to the eye or involve the eye and the skin.

Albinism is an inherited, genetic disorder. Parents of a baby with albinism should never feel guilty about this, it is not their fault. It is a condition caused by the specific albinism genes that a baby has inherited from his/her mother and father at the time of conception.

Albinism is stable and won't get worse, but the effects are manageable. It doesn't affect intelligence.



9 Albinism myths BUSTED

1 Caused by inbreeding or incest
Genetic condition where body unable to produce melanin (colour in hair, skin & eyes). Can be carried over from parent to child

2 Is a curse from gods or ancestors
Genetic condition where body unable to produce melanin (colour in hair, skin & eyes). Can be carried over from parent to child

3 Body parts make charms that can make you rich
Not true. This is a myth spread by witch-doctors to enrich themselves

4 Drinking blood of people with albinism gives magical powers
People with albinism are normal human beings and don't have magical powers

5 People with albinism are sterile
Not true. People with albinism are fertile and can have children like other people do.

6 People with albinism are not intelligent
Not true. People with albinism can perform academically well.

7 Can only see at night
People with albinism have eyesight problems due to lack of 'melanin' pigmentation in the retina. They can see during the day & at night, but they may either be short or long sighted and may need sight aids.

8 Mother slept with a white man
Children born with albinism may look 'white' due to absent or reduced pigmentation but are not products of cross race sexual relationships.

9 Don't die, they simply vanish
All people with albinism die like other normally pigmented people. There's no such thing as vanishing.

Managing secondary effects

Skin sensitivity

Because of the lack of pigments, the eyes and skin of people with albinism are very sensitive to light. Due to this sensitivity people with albinism may develop sores on their skin that could develop into skin cancer.

To protect the eyes and skin from the harmful effects of the sun it is recommended that people with albinism -

- Keep out of the sun especially between 11h00 to 13h00
- Use sun barrier cream with at least SPF 25 (sun protection factor) on sun exposed areas.
- Use lip protection cream of at least SPF 25
- Use large brimmed hats.
- Long sleeved cotton shirts and blouses with high collars
- Wear long pants whenever possible, to protect the legs

Visual impairment

- Wear sunglasses when outdoors, even on overcast days.
- Use large brimmed hats.
- Regular checkups with an optometrist

Signs & Symptoms

Eyes

- Light brown to pale blue in colour
- Sensitivity to the sun
- Fast involuntary back & forth movement of the eyes,
- Squinting
- Visual impairment & low vision

Skin

- Very pale in colour
- Freckling or pigmented patches might develop on sun-exposed areas
- Very sensitive to the sun (burns easily).

Hair

- Hair color ranges from white, yellow, light brown to reddish.
- Eye lashes and brows whitish.