



Nutrition

A common question that people with vitiligo ask is whether their diet makes any difference to their skin condition. Choosing the food we eat is something we can manage, so having a good diet is something practical we can do to help ourselves.

ARE THERE ANY
particular foods
THAT SHOULD BE EATEN
OR AVOIDED?

No. The body is complex, requiring a wide, balanced range of nutrients to maintain it in a healthy state. These nutrients need each other to function effectively. This is why picking out one type of food, vitamin or mineral to take as a supplement is not usually helpful.

It will not help either to avoid particular food groups. It is not true (as has been suggested in some cultures) that avoiding white foods can lead to an improvement in vitiligo. White foods include dairy products, which are a good source of calcium, particularly important for young children to develop strong bones and teeth.

You need a balanced, varied diet, including the nutrients which are involved in the pigmentation process and those which promote a healthy skin generally.

What nutrients

SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN
A BALANCED DIET FOR
SOMEONE WITH VITILIGO?

Scientists have been working on the connection between diet and vitiligo. Although no one nutrient has been identified as a 'cure', it is evident that the following nutrients are involved in pigmentation and maintaining healthy skin:

Vitamin B12 and folic acid

Vitamin B12 and folic acid work closely together and it seems we need a balance of these nutrients.

Folic acid contains substances which play a role in the pigmentation process. It occurs naturally in green leafy vegetables, also yeast extract, offal and legumes. In the UK, folic acid is added to many foods, such as some breakfast cereals and bread.

Evidence suggests that low levels of vitamin B12 could be a factor in vitiligo for a few people. This is because there seems to be some association between vitiligo and pernicious anaemia, a condition in which people cannot absorb vitamin B12. Vitamin B12 is found in most animal products, milk and egg yolks and some cereals are fortified with it. If you have a vegetarian or vegan diet, you need to make sure that you have enough of this vitamin.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C is needed to keep skin healthy, and it is also needed for some enzymes which are involved in skin pigmentation. If you eat plenty of fruit, especially citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit, lemons) and vegetables, this should give you enough vitamin C. You need at least five portions a day.

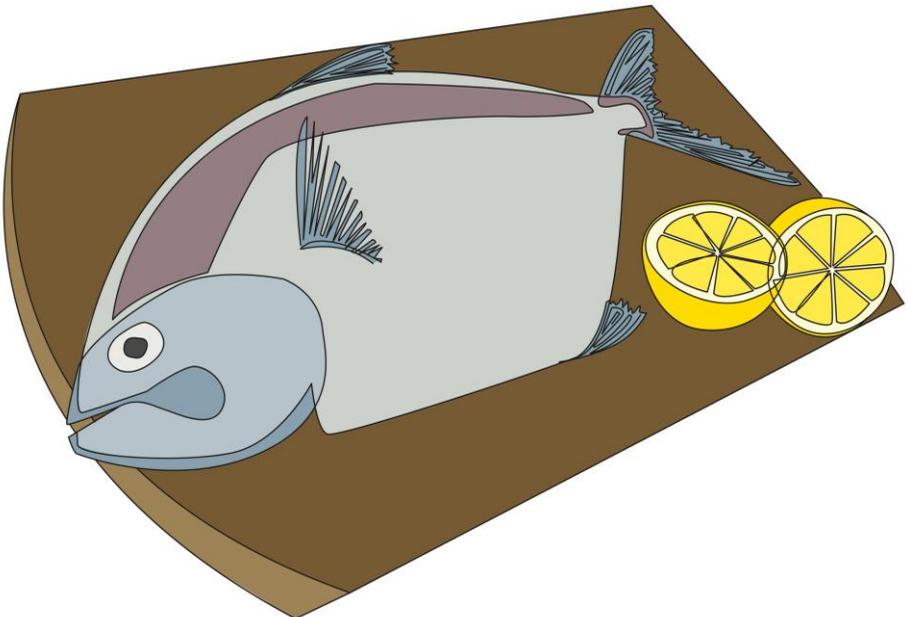
Vitamin C is also an antioxidant; this means that it helps to maintain the body's immune system by controlling destructive agents (called free radicals) that are the result of metabolic activity. Other antioxidants include vitamins A and E, beta carotene, minerals such as selenium, copper and zinc.



Vitamin D

Vitamin D is vital for bone health and it can also help to maintain a healthy immune system. There is growing evidence that low levels of Vitamin D may be linked to a number of diseases such as some cancers, diabetes, MS and Alzheimer's. Vitamin D can be supplied by foods such as oily fish (e.g. mackerel, herring, salmon, sardines), cod liver oil, liver, milk and eggs. Margarine, some milk powders, yogurts and some cereals are fortified.

However, about 90% of our requirement of vitamin D is made by the body from the effect of sunlight on the skin. There has been concern that if people with vitiligo continuously use sunblock, this may prevent the body producing enough vitamin D. Most vitamin D is produced during the summer, when only a small amount of exposure (20 – 30 minutes a day, two or three times a week) is needed. The body can store vitamin D for the winter months (see more information in the *Suncare* and *Vitamin D – further information* eBooklets).



Beta carotene

Beta carotene is an antioxidant (see above in vitamin C), so it helps to maintain healthy skin. In large doses, beta carotene is deposited in the skin, giving it a yellow tint. However, it does not remain in the skin, so it needs to be taken continuously to maintain the colour. Remember though that too much beta carotene is not very good for your liver! Beta carotene is found in all dark green, orange and yellow vegetables and fruits, including carrots.

Minerals

Copper, iron and zinc all have a role in the pigmentation process. Most foods provide some copper, but it is particularly found in nuts, offal, wheat, bran and shellfish. Iron is found naturally in red meat (especially liver), oily fish, pulse vegetables, dark green vegetables and dried fruit (especially apricots). Iron from vegetable sources is better absorbed if eaten with a source of vitamin C. Iron is also added to many breads and cereals. The best sources of zinc are seafood, meat and poultry, dairy products, eggs, nuts and pulse vegetables.

ARE VITAMIN AND
MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS
a good idea?

If you have a healthy, balanced diet it should not be necessary to take supplements. Supplements may be a good idea if for some reason you have to have a restricted diet, or if it is found that you have a specific deficiency. You should not take more than the recommended dose though.

Some vitamins, notably vitamins A and D, are stored in the body. If you take too much of them, they can be toxic and make you feel ill. Vitamin C is not stored in the body and needs to be eaten daily, so there is no point having large doses of it.

Water

Healthy skin needs to be well hydrated, so drinking plenty of water is part of a healthy diet.

Summary

Unfortunately, current research suggests that changing the food you eat is not going to cure your vitiligo. However, this may well help if you are not eating a healthy, varied, balanced diet at the moment. Such a diet is needed to give you a good supply of the nutrients described above. You need to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables (at least five servings per day), as well as a variety of starchy foods and proteins. Try to cut down on fatty, rich foods and processed foods, which have fewer nutrients. A healthy diet, including drinking plenty of water, is good for you generally, not just your skin!

Further information

More detailed information about nutrition is available on the Vitiligo Society website **www.vitiligosociety.org.uk**. There is also an eBooklet about vitamin D specifically, which looks at some of the current concerns about this nutrient.

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