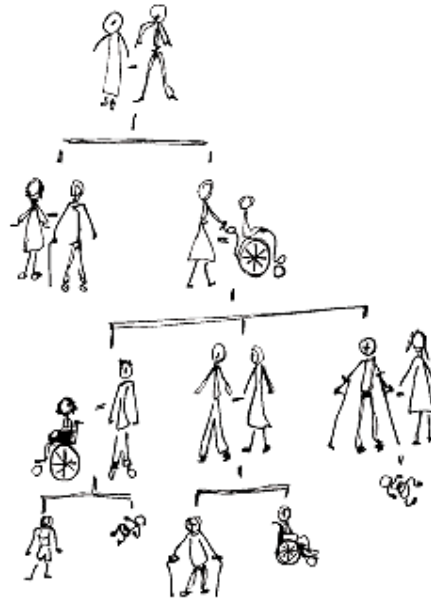


CROSS-CURRICULAR MATERIALS FOR KEY STAGE 4  
(SCOTTISH CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION - STANDARD GRADE)



## Genes and You

Teaching about genetics from a human perspective

by Gill Mullinar

GENETIC INTEREST GROUP

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# GENETIC CHROMOSOMAL CONDITION CARDS

GENETIC CHROMOSOMAL CONDITION CARDS ON THE FOLLOWING:



VITILIGO

## Vitiligo

### WHAT IS VITILIGO?

Vitiligo (pronounced vit-er-lye-goe) is a skin condition in which patches of skin turn white. This is because the pigment cells which create melanins (the substances which give the skin its colour) have been destroyed. Vitiligo differs from many of the conditions described in the Genetic Condition Cards because there is no clear pattern of inheritance and no-one yet knows which (if any) gene or group of genes is responsible for the condition in humans. Vitiligo is probably a group of related conditions perhaps with different genetic components. The genes affect one's predisposition to Vitiligo, rather than definitely giving someone the disorder.

### WHAT CAUSES VITILIGO?

No-one is quite sure, but it appears that the condition can be triggered by many physical and psychological events including surgery, skin damage, accidents, hormonal changes, bereavement and stress. It is thought that in some cases the body's own immune system destroys the pigment cells.

### VITILIGO

#### A PERSON WITH VITILIGO MAY BE AFFECTED IN SOME OR ALL, OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

Vitiligo can affect anyone at any age, although most people get it before they are 20 years old. The speed and pattern of development of the white patches are unpredictable - they usually get bigger with time, but this can happen quickly or slowly over many years. Some people find that the patches stay the same size for a long time, while others (particularly children) may find that their Vitiligo improves without any treatment. It is not known why this happens.

Vitiligo affects all ethnic groups but is more obvious in people with darker skins.

In some people, the hair is affected as well as the skin. The white skin patches have no pigment to protect them against the sun's rays, so people with Vitiligo have to be very careful to avoid sunburn by wearing suitable clothing and using sunscreens with a high protection factor. You cannot catch Vitiligo (it is not contagious or infectious).

### OTHER INFORMATION

- Vitiligo sometimes runs in families, but only about a third of people with Vitiligo have a close relative affected by it. Children who have one parent with Vitiligo appear to have about a 5-6% chance of developing Vitiligo themselves at some point during their lifetime.
- Treatment for Vitiligo is available, but there is as yet no cure. Common treatments include the short-term use of steroid creams on affected areas to stop the Vitiligo spreading, and the use of special drugs (psoralens) plus ultraviolet A light to try and stimulate pigment to develop in the white patches. Both these treatments require careful medical supervision.
- Vitiligo, like other skin conditions, can make people very self-conscious about their appearance and cause a lot of anxiety and distress. The use of cosmetic camouflage creams and self-tanning preparations on the face and exposed areas of the body help some people to feel more confident about the way they look, but some people with Vitiligo who are teased or bullied in school can react by becoming very withdrawn or even aggressive to hide the hurt they feel.
- It is estimated that more than 500,000 people in the UK alone, and a massive 50 million people worldwide, are affected by vitiligo

**If you are interested in finding out more about Vitiligo, you can write (enclosing an A5 stamped addressed envelope) to:  
The Vitiligo Society, 125 Kennington Road, London, SE11 6SF. Telephone 020 7840 0855 [www.vitiligosociety.org.uk](http://www.vitiligosociety.org.uk)**