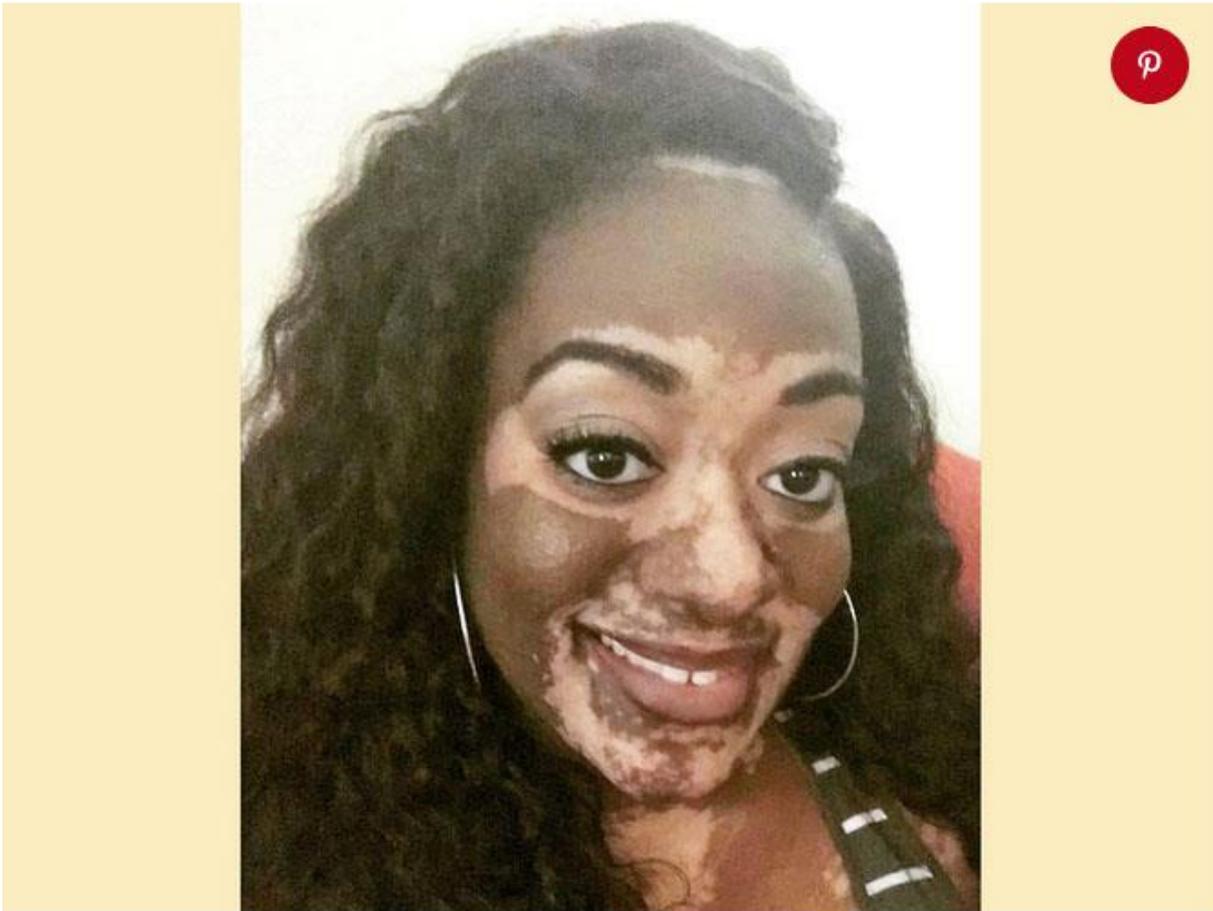


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This Woman Developed Vitiligo Right Before Her Wedding Day

And she handled it like a champ.



Thanks to the visibility of Winnie Harlow and other models, Instagram celebrities, and athletes, vitiligo is something many of us are becoming more familiar with. Kandice Benford is one of the many people who has the condition, which causes patches of your skin to turn white, and she developed a particularly severe case of it across her face right before her wedding day.

The Mississippi-based hairdresser tells SELF that she first had a small bout of vitiligo when she was in college. “It appeared on my finger and my doctor said it would go away,” she recalls. “It did—it just came and went.” Bedford says she would have little spots that would show up on her skin “here and there” but they all were tiny and would simply go away over time.

But in May, her fiancé had an undisclosed illness that Benford says was “really serious” and it happened around the same time as the couple was planning their wedding. “It was really stressful. I was worried about him,” she

says. During that time, she noticed a little spot of vitiligo on her nose. “I thought it was going to go away, but it spread a little,” she says. Then, it spread across her face and developed on her hands. “I was just worrying and stressing over my husband and the wedding,” she says. Her doctors told her that stress may have triggered the condition, but they’re not entirely sure.

Unlike previous experiences, the vitiligo on Benford's face hasn't gone away, and she says she’s now come to terms with her skin condition. “I used to try to cover it up but now I just embrace it and be me,” she says. In fact, for her wedding day, she just wore a light layer of makeup. Her husband also been supportive. “He always told me I didn’t need to cover it up because I’m beautiful with it,” she says.

Vitiligo isn't totally understood, but it's thought to be an autoimmune condition that causes a person’s own immune system to attack cells that make pigment in their skin.

Vitiligo causes a person’s skin to form white patches, and those patches happen because cells that make pigment in your skin are destroyed, according to the National Institutes of Health. Anyone can get vitiligo, but it typically starts when someone is in their 20s, the NIH says. It’s also more noticeable in people with darker skin. Vitiligo may run in families, so you’re more likely to develop it if your mom or dad also has it.

Although the link between vitiligo and stress isn’t conclusive, we know that stress can do a number of (not great) things to your body—including impacting your skin. “Stress makes everything worse,” [Gary Goldenberg, M.D.](#), assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, tells SELF. And that’s true of physical and emotional stress—both can alter your immune system and increase production of the stress hormone, cortisol, causing increased inflammation that can trigger vitiligo.



There are some treatments for vitiligo out there, but results can vary.

“In my experience, what really frustrates patients is the fact that not every treatment will work for every patient,” Dr. Goldenberg says. “So, many different treatments may need to be tried before a patient may respond.”

Treatment options include anti-inflammatory creams, medications that affect the immune system, a combination of medication and light therapy, removing the pigment of darker areas of skin, tattooing small sections of skin, and sometimes surgery. And while it isn't an approved treatment method, Dr. Goldenberg says that an anti-inflammatory diet may help.

For now, people with vitiligo may have to try several different options to treat their condition—or learn to embrace it. Benford has chosen the latter and says she really isn't bothered by her vitiligo now. Her advice to others struggling to accept their skin discoloration? “Just love yourself and be patient," she says. "You're stronger than you think.”