

Evaluation and Treatment of *Malassezia*-Related Skin Disorders

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Malassezia are commensal yeasts found on the sebaceous areas of human skin. Although they are part of the normal skin flora, they play a pathogenic role in several skin conditions, most notably tinea versicolor, *Pityrosporum* folliculitis, and seborrheic dermatitis. *Malassezia* also have been associated with subsets of psoriasis and atopic dermatitis, especially those affecting the scalp. Patients are often distressed by the appearance of *Malassezia*-related diseases, particularly the dyspigmentation of tinea versicolor and the scaling and erythema of seborrheic dermatitis and scalp psoriasis. Treatment of *Malassezia*-related dermatoses generally requires the use of topical or oral antifungal medications, often in combination with antifungal washes and shampoos. In some cases, low-potency corticosteroids are a useful adjunct. Patients with *Malassezia* dermatoses need to be educated on the tendency of these eruptions to recur unless maintenance treatment is continued indefinitely. The appearance of skin affected by *Malassezia* may take months to normalize, even after successful treatment.

Malassezia are commensal yeasts found on the sebaceous areas of human skin. Although they are a part of normal skin flora, *Malassezia* also play a pathogenic role in several dermatological conditions with substantial cosmetic consequences. *Malassezia* yeasts cause the dyspigmented patches of tinea versicolor, the inflamed red papules and pustules of *Pityrosporum* folliculitis, and the erythematous, scaling facial and scalp skin seen in seborrheic dermatitis.¹ There is evidence that

Malassezia may even play a role in atopic dermatitis and psoriasis, especially in cases involving the scalp.

HISTORY AND TAXONOMY

Malassezia yeasts were first described in the mid-19th century on the skin of patients with seborrheic dermatitis. They are named after Louis Charles Malassez, a French scientist who in 1874 described budding yeasts isolated from the skin. Another French physician and microbiologist, Raymond JA Sabouraud, proposed the genus name *Pityrosporum* in 1904 for fungal spores seen on human skin. The *Pityrosporum* genus was later differentiated into *Pityrosporum orbiculare* for types with round spores and *Pityrosporum ovale* for variants with oval shape.²

Until quite recently, the name *Malassezia* was used to denote fungi with hyphal forms seen on the skin of patients with tinea versicolor, whereas the term *Pityrosporum* was used to denote the yeast forms seen in

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