



# VITILIGO

HOW TO ADDRESS CLIENTS WITH FAIRYLIKE LASHES. *By Megan James*

**You've heard** the most common concerns from clients who want to enhance their lashes or brows: too thin, too short or too light. But what about a person who comes in with white lashes or brows due to an incurable skin ailment? "Vitiligo is an autoimmune skin condition in which the pigment is lost from areas of the skin, causing whitish or depigmented patches," explains Edidiong Kaminska, MD, MBS, FAAD, board certified dermatologist in Chicago. It's a relatively uncommon disease, with about 1 percent of the world's population affected, according to Vitiligo Support International, which means that more than 50 million people are affected. And, while eyelash and brow leukotrichia, or white lashes and brows (a symptom of vitiligo), is not contagious or dangerous, it can cause emotional issues, Dr. Kaminska says. The look is often described as "fairylike" or "ethereal," but many clients only want their lush lashes and bold brows to return.

## THE BASICS

Vitiligo affects all races and both sexes equally, although it's often more noticeable on those with a darker skin color. Melanin from hair and skin is constantly being replaced, but when someone has vitiligo, this process gets

interrupted. The cause is unknown, though many researchers believe that a genetic predisposition or susceptibility exists in those who develop the condition. "Scientific and medical data are lacking for treatments of vitiligo lashes," says Dr. Kaminska. "Treatment options include topical medications, such as corticosteroids and pseudocatalase PC-KUS. And hair and cellular transplantation of cells and/or follicles with normal pigment have been reported in a subset of patients," she continues. However, these are experimental treatments and are not widely performed. Raman Madan, MD, director of cosmetic dermatology at Northwell Health in Lake Success, New York, agrees, "Latisse and eyelash transplants have been hypothesized to work, but controlled studies have shown no success." Temporary fixes, such as applying mascara or using lash tinting, may not last long, but they have a much higher success rate.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

As a lash or brow artist, you have an incredible opportunity to provide vitiligo clients with a solution. Lash enhancements and tinting are great ways to camouflage the issue, especially with clients who may have developed low self-esteem because of their unique

appearance. And while the lashes may look a little different, they're still lashes. "You're acting on normal lashes; they just happen to lack color," explains Dr. Madan. As opposed to most clients who are looking for lashes as simply a cosmetic add-on, Dr. Kaminska believes that "providers should take vitiligo clients' concerns seriously," she says. "After all, treating vitiligo of the eyelashes may significantly improve a patient's quality of life."

## CAUTIONS

Eyelash extensions and tinting for vitiligo clients are generally considered very safe when applied by a licensed professional. "The risks are the same as for someone without vitiligo," assures Dr. Madan. The only real difference is that some clients may need extra maintenance or less time in between appointments if their vitiligo case is severe. The biggest risk, really, is whether or not it's legal to provide tinting services in your state. "No special precautions are necessary," adds Dr. Kaminska; just make sure to check and understand the jurisdiction of your state and local cosmetology and esthetics boards. Ultimately, the most important thing is to treat these clients the same way you would treat any others.