

# Information about Albinism

## What Do You Call Me?

The general public is no doubt familiar with the term “albino”, which brings to mind images of a person or animal with a pale complexion and pink eyes. The term “albinism”, by contrast, is less commonplace or recognizable to most people, unless one actually knows a person with the condition. We all know that words can be very powerful. So, what is the “politically correct” way to say that someone is an albino?

In the albinism community, opinions vary on the use of the word “albino”. While some find it to be an extraordinarily offensive term, others feel the label carries neutral or even empowering connotations. Many people with albinism agree that their feelings about the word “albino” depend on the context or intent in which it is used. The term can be derogatory when it’s said mockingly or with malice. Or, it can be used innocently by someone who means no offense or is just curious.

Some people with albinism grew up in families or communities that used the word “albino” often and learned at an early age that there was no shame or negativity in referring to themselves as such. Others may have found that they were only called “albino” when they were being teased and grew to have a very negative association with the word, some describing it as being almost as offensive as a racial slur.

Some children and adults with albinism may use the term “albino” proudly and may feel almost empowered by “taking back” a once offensive word. By showing the world that they are comfortable calling themselves a word they once found hurtful or derogatory, the

word “albino” loses all the power and shock value that it once claimed. By taking personal ownership of one’s condition, many people with albinism find that words like “albino” can no longer hurt them. This is, of course, a very personal decision and not all people with albinism may feel comfortable using or hearing the term.

Although there are many adults with albinism who are at peace with the term “albino”, when dealing with any condition, when in doubt, it is best to put the person first by saying, “a person with albinism” rather than “an albino” or “an albino person”. The rationale for this person-centered language, of course, is to do just that: put the person ahead of the condition. When a person is referred to as “an albino”, he or she is essentially being filed down to and defined by nothing more than their condition. It’s as though the world looks at that person and sees only the condition of albinism. In this way, it can feel like a dehumanizing label.

To most in the albinism community, the term “person with albinism” will always be a kinder, gentler, less shocking term. Regardless of the context, the word “albino” can sometimes be an ugly, jolting word to many, especially when heard unexpectedly. If you’re ever unsure, just ask. In a world of political correctness run rampant, you shouldn’t feel the need to tiptoe around the obvious. Every person with albinism will have their own experiences and opinions about the label. Just remember that, even though we may be “albinos”, we are, above all else, people who happen to have the condition of albinism.