

What is an epidermal nevus?

An epidermal nevus is a common birthmark that causes the skin to be a different texture than the rest of the skin. It is often seen at birth or in early childhood.

WHAT DOES AN EPIDERMAL NEVUS LOOK LIKE?

An epidermal nevus can be flat or raised. The color can be pink, brown, or black. These birthmarks are most often seen on the body, arms, or legs. They commonly appear in the shape of a straight or curved line. The size can vary. Some patients only have one epidermal nevus, and other patients may have several on different parts of the body.

An epidermal nevus may be present at birth. It can also appear later. Sometimes an epidermal nevus appears in infancy, later in childhood, or even in the teenage years.

Over time, they can become thicker and rougher. The epidermal nevus may also get darker over time.

WHAT CAUSES AN EPIDERMAL NEVUS?

A small genetic change in the skin of the epidermal nevus makes certain skin cells overgrow. This change occurs before birth, even though the epidermal nevus may not be seen until later. These genetic changes appear by chance.

How the epidermal nevus looks depends on which genetic change caused the nevus. It may be red and rough, or brown and bumpy.

For certain types of epidermal nevus, there may be a small chance of passing this genetic change on to future children. The chance of this depends on the type of epidermal nevus, the genetic change that caused it, and how widespread it is on the body. Talk with your child's doctor about whether this is possible for their type of epidermal nevus.

HOW IS AN EPIDERMAL NEVUS DIAGNOSED?

Most of the time, a doctor can make the diagnosis just by looking at the skin. Sometimes, a small piece of the skin from the birthmark (skin biopsy) is sent to be looked at under a microscope.

ARE THERE ANY COMPLICATIONS OF AN EPIDERMAL NEVUS?

Most people with an epidermal nevus do not have any problems related to their birthmark.

Patients with a very large epidermal nevus may rarely also have changes in the eyes, brain, or bones. This is called epidermal nevus syndrome. Less than 1% of patients with an epidermal nevus will have epidermal nevus syndrome.

The epidermal nevus might sometimes get irritated or itchy. This is more likely if the epidermal nevus is in a location where clothing or jewelry is rubbing on the skin.

TREATMENTS

Treatment is usually not necessary. If the epidermal nevus is itchy, topical anti-inflammatory creams may be used. Retinoid creams may also be tried. These can help to thin out the epidermal nevus. Some epidermal nevus birthmarks can be treated with surgery or laser. Both surgery and laser can cause scarring. After treatment, there is a chance the birthmark will grow back.



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