

What is morphea?

Morphea is a skin condition that causes patches of skin to become hard, thick, and shiny like a scar. These patches can be darker or lighter than normal skin.

WHAT CAUSES MORPHEA?

Morphea happens when the immune system attacks the skin by mistake. Doctors do not know why children get morphea. It is not passed down from parents. It is not contagious. It is not a cancer.

WHO GETS MORPHEA?

Anyone can get morphea. We see it more in children and young adults.

WHAT DOES MORPHEA LOOK LIKE?

Morphea occurs as hard or thick skin patches. These may be lighter or darker than normal skin, or they can be reddish or purple in color. The skin may feel tight or dry. There are a few types of morphea (see sidebar).

HOW IS MORPHEA DIAGNOSED?

Your doctor can tell it is morphea by looking at your skin and asking questions about how you feel. Sometimes more testing is needed. Your doctor may want to do a skin biopsy where they take a piece of skin to be looked at under the microscope.

IS ANY TESTING NEEDED FOR CHILDREN WITH MORPHEA?

Testing is not always needed for morphea. Your doctor may want an ultrasound or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to know how deep the morphea is or to keep track of how the medicines are helping. In some cases, your doctor may want blood tests to look for other problems.

HOW IS MORPHEA TREATED?

Depending on the type and how severe the morphea is, your dermatologist may want you to use different treatments to flatten and soften the patches:

- » Creams or ointments like clobetasol (topical steroid)
- » Ultraviolet light therapy
- » Pill or liquid medicine like methotrexate or steroids (if morphea is on larger areas, crossing a joint, or on the face)

IS MORPHEA DANGEROUS?

Most cases are mild and can get better with time. Some morphea can cause stiffness or change the way the skin looks or feels. Morphea usually does not affect anything on the inside of the body. If the morphea is over a joint, it may become harder to move it. If it is on the head or face, your doctor may want you to see an eye or brain doctor.

TYPES OF MORPHEA:

- » **Localized:** One or few small patches
- » **Linear:** A patch of morphea in a line, often on the forehead, arms, or legs
- » **Generalized:** Larger areas of the skin on multiple parts of the body
- » **Profundus:** Affects the skin and fat under the skin



The Society for Pediatric Dermatology
8365 Keystone Crossing, Suite 107
Indianapolis, IN 46240
(317) 202-0224
www.pedsderm.net

Authors:
Elizabeth Lewis Nieman, MD
Manish K. Shah, MD

Reviewers:
Sonia Kamath, MD
Vivian Lombillo, MD, PhD