

Morphea

(Localized Scleroderma)

What is morphea?

Morphea is a skin condition. It starts as red or purple patches on the skin that get hard with time. Sometimes it affects muscles, joints, or bones. In rare cases it can affect internal structures. Morphea is not contagious. It normally does not itch or hurt. It can go away on its own after a few years, but it may leave scars.

There are many types of morphea.

- **Circumscribed.** This is the most common type. A few spots, called plaques occur on only one part of the body. See Fig 1.
- **Linear.** Line-shaped lesions that often occur on the arms, legs, or head. Most of the time it is only on one side. This is the most common form in children. See Fig 2.
- **Generalized.** Plaques on two or more areas of the body. Most often they appear first on the trunk. They may later spread to the arms and legs.
- **Mixed.** A mix of two or more of the above types.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

What causes it?

The cause of morphea is not known. It is considered an autoimmune disease. It may be inherited (genetic).

How is it diagnosed?

Morphea is normally diagnosed by a dermatologist or rheumatologist. Many times, it can be diagnosed by asking questions and doing an exam. A skin biopsy may be needed.

How is it treated?

Your doctor will work with you to decide the best treatment for your child. Treatment is used to keep the scars from getting worse. Some treatments are done to decrease inflammation in the skin. They include creams or ointments that go on the skin (topical):

- Steroids.
- Non-steroid cream or ointment called tacrolimus or pimecrolimus.
- A form of vitamin D called calcipotriene.

An oral or injectable medicine called methotrexate may be used for more severe morphea.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.