

WHAT IS SCLERODERMA?

More than 300,000 Americans live with some type of scleroderma.

Scleroderma, also known as systemic sclerosis, is a rare autoimmune disease that causes the body to produce too much collagen, leading to the hardening and thickening of the skin and other tissues. While it's most noticeable on the skin, it can also affect blood vessels, internal organs, and the digestive system. Scleroderma can vary widely from person to person, with some experiencing only mild skin changes and others facing more serious complications.

01 | Types

Scleroderma is generally grouped into two main types: localized scleroderma and systemic sclerosis. Localized scleroderma usually affects only the skin, causing thick, waxy patches or streaks, and is often milder. In contrast, systemic sclerosis can impact not only the skin but also blood vessels and internal organs like the lungs, heart, and digestive system, which can lead to more serious complications. This form may develop either gradually or more quickly and often requires ongoing medical care to manage symptoms.

02 | Symptoms

Scleroderma symptoms include:

- Skin thickening and tightening
- Joint pain and stiffness
- Fatigue
- Digestive issues
- Shortness of breath or coughing
- Changes in skin appearance
- Weight loss or general weakness
- Numbness or discoloration of fingers and toes

03 | Treatment

Although there's no cure, treatment options can help manage symptoms, slow progression, and support a better quality of life. Treatment plans are tailored to each person, depending on which parts of the body are affected. They may include medications to control the immune system, improve blood flow, or relieve specific issues like pain, digestive problems, or breathing difficulties. Physical or occupational therapy can help maintain mobility and independence, while skin treatments and light therapy may ease skin-related symptoms. In more severe cases, advanced options like stem cell transplants may be considered to help address serious complications.

For more information on scleroderma, please visit scleroderma.org/.

Did You Know?

Scleroderma occurs more often in women than men.

References

<https://scleroderma.org/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/scleroderma/symptoms-causes/syc-20351952>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/scleroderma>