

Scleroderma is a rare autoimmune connective tissue disorder characterized by abnormal thickening of the skin. Connective tissue is composed of collagen, which supports and binds other body tissues. There are several types of scleroderma. Some types affect certain, specific parts of the body, while other types can affect the whole body and internal organs (systemic). Scleroderma is also known as progressive systemic sclerosis. The exact cause of scleroderma is unknown. The systemic form of scleroderma is thought to affect from 40,000 to 165,000 people in the United States. The disease is three to four times more common in females than in males. Scleroderma may occur at any age but the symptoms most frequently begin during midlife.