

Mottled Skin Before Death: What Is It?

As patients near the end of life, the signs and symptoms may differ depending on the illness they have. There are, however, some common signs that can be helpful for a caregiver to be aware of as the end approaches. When a patient is declining, one sign you may notice in particular is mottled skin before death.

What is mottled skin?

Mottling occurs when the heart is no longer able to pump blood effectively. The blood pressure slowly drops and blood flow throughout the body slows, causing one's extremities to begin to feel cold to the touch. Mottled skin before death presents as a red or purple marbled appearance. It is most often first seen in the feet, from where it then travels up the legs.



When does mottling occur?

Mottling is typically seen in the last week of life, although there is no exact timeline. It can occur in the final week or not until the final hours. While mottling can be one sign of approaching death, caregivers should also look for other end-of-life symptoms including changes in breathing and diminished food and water intake.

Is mottling painful?

Mottled skin before death does not cause any pain to the patient, but the patient may feel cold. Caregivers can help to keep them comfortable by keeping them covered with warm blankets.

As end-of-life nears, it is important to be a calm, comforting presence for a patient and loved ones. Hold their hand and speak in a normal tone of voice. Even if they are unresponsive, they may still be able to hear.

Adapted from: <https://www.crossroadshospice.com/hospice-palliative-care-blog/2017/march/02/mottled-skin-before-death-what-is-it/>