Cherubism

Cherubism is a disorder characterized by abnormal bone tissue in the lower part of the face. Beginning in early childhood, both the lower jaw (the mandible) and the upper jaw (the maxilla) become enlarged as bone is replaced with painless, cyst-like growths. These growths give the cheeks a swollen, rounded appearance and often interfere with normal tooth development. In some people the condition is so mild that it may not be noticeable, while other cases are severe enough to cause problems with vision, breathing, speech, and swallowing. Enlargement of the jaw usually continues throughout childhood and stabilizes during puberty. The abnormal growths are gradually replaced with normal bone in early adulthood. As a result, many affected adults have a normal facial appearance.

Most people with cherubism have few, if any, signs and symptoms affecting other parts of the body. Rarely, however, this condition occurs as part of another genetic disorder. For example, cherubism can occur with Ramon syndrome, which also involves short stature, intellectual disability, and overgrowth of the gums (gingival fibrosis). Additionally, cherubism has been reported in rare cases of Noonan syndrome (a developmental disorder characterized by unusual facial characteristics, short stature, and heart defects) and fragile X syndrome (a condition primarily affecting males that causes learning disabilities and cognitive impairment).

Frequency

The incidence of cherubism is unknown. At least 250 cases have been reported worldwide.

Causes

Mutations in the SH3BP2 gene have been identified in about 80 percent of people with cherubism. In most of the remaining cases, the genetic cause of the condition is unknown.

The SH3BP2 gene provides instructions for making a protein whose exact function is unclear. The protein plays a role in transmitting chemical signals within cells, particularly cells involved in the replacement of old bone tissue with new bone (bone remodeling) and certain immune system cells.

Mutations in the SH3BP2 gene lead to the production of an overly active version of this protein. The effects of SH3BP2 mutations are still under study, but researchers believe that the abnormal protein disrupts critical signaling pathways in cells associated with the maintenance of bone tissue and in some immune system cells. The overactive protein likely causes inflammation in the jaw bones and triggers the production of osteoclasts, which are cells that break down bone tissue during bone remodeling. An excess of
these bone-eating cells contributes to the destruction of bone in the upper and lower jaws. A combination of bone loss and inflammation likely underlies the cyst-like growths characteristic of cherubism.

**Inheritance Pattern**

This condition is inherited in an autosomal dominant pattern, which means one copy of the altered gene in each cell is sufficient to cause the disorder.

**Other Names for This Condition**

- Familial benign giant-cell tumor of the jaw
- Familial fibrous dysplasia of jaw
- Familial multilocular cystic disease of the jaws

**Diagnosis & Management**

**Genetic Testing Information**

- What is genetic testing? [primer/testing/genetictesting](/primer/testing/genetictesting)

**Research Studies from ClinicalTrials.gov**

- ClinicalTrials.gov [https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/results?cond=%22cherubism%22](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/results?cond=%22cherubism%22)

**Other Diagnosis and Management Resources**


**Additional Information & Resources**

**Health Information from MedlinePlus**

- Health Topic: Craniofacial Abnormalities [https://medlineplus.gov/craniofacialabnormalities.html](https://medlineplus.gov/craniofacialabnormalities.html)

**Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center**

- Cherubism [https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/6036/cherubism](https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/6036/cherubism)
Educational Resources

• MalaCards: cherubism
  https://www.malacards.org/card/cherubism

• Orphanet: Cherubism
  https://www.orpha.net/consor/cgi-bin/OC_Exp.php?Lng=EN&Expert=184

Patient Support and Advocacy Resources

• AboutFace International
  https://www.aboutface.ca/

• AmeriFace
  http://www.ameriface.org/

• Children's Craniofacial Association
  https://ccakids.org/

• Resource list from the University of Kansas Medical Center
  http://www.kumc.edu/gec/support/craniofa.html

Clinical Information from GeneReviews

• Cherubism
  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK1137

Scientific Articles on PubMed

• PubMed
  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=%28Cherubism%5BMAJR%5D
  %29+AND+%28cherubism%5BTIAB%5D%29+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND
  +human%5Bmh%5D+AND+%22last+1800+days%22%5Bdp%5D

Catalog of Genes and Diseases from OMIM

• CHERUBISM
  http://omim.org/entry/118400

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