

Lichen Sclerosus

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What is lichen sclerosus?

Lichen sclerosus is a condition that causes white patches on the skin. It usually happens on the genitals, where it can also cause itching and pain. It is more common in women than in men. Women are most likely to get lichen sclerosus before puberty or after menopause.

What causes lichen sclerosus?

The cause of lichen sclerosus is unknown. An overactive immune system or imbalance of hormones may play a role. Previous skin damage may increase the likelihood of developing lichen sclerosus in that area.

What are the symptoms of lichen sclerosus?

Signs and symptoms of lichen sclerosus include the following:

- Itching of the vulva (the area around the opening of the vagina) or around the anus.
- Discomfort or dull pain in the vulva or around the anus.
- Vaginal discharge.
- Pain during sex or urination.
- Skin changes around the vulva or anus including white skin, blotchy and wrinkled patches, bruising, or cracks in the skin that sometimes bleed.
- In severe cases, bleeding, blistering, or ulcerated sores.

How is lichen sclerosus evaluated?

Your provider will do an examination and ask about your symptoms. You may also have a biopsy of the vulvar skin.

How is lichen sclerosus treated?

Lichen sclerosus is a chronic condition, so you can't get rid of it, but you can treat it. It is important for women with this condition to get

treatment as soon as possible and to continue treatment until you are advised to stop. Lichen sclerosus that is not treated can cause permanent changes to the skin of the vulva. In addition, people who get lichen sclerosus have a higher risk of cancer in the genital area. It is important to check the vulva monthly to note any changes.

Treatment options include lifestyle changes to keep the vulva healthy and medications to help relieve your symptoms.

Self management:

One thing that you can do is to provide gentle care to the vulva and avoid products or items that may be irritating. The following may be helpful in reducing your symptoms:

- Avoid pantyhose.
- Wear 100% cotton underwear.
- Wear loose fitting cotton garments, avoid tight pants and jeans, swimsuits, leotards, thongs, and lycra garments.
- If wearing a pad, change to 100% cotton pads.
- Avoid bubble baths.
- Use unscented detergents .
- Use fragrance free, pH neutral soaps (i.e. Dove, Ivory).
- Avoid feminine sprays, douches, or powders.
- Use non dyed toilet articles.
- Dry the vulva with gentle patting, not with rubbing.

Medications:

- Corticosteroid ointments or creams are commonly prescribed for lichen sclerosus. Initially, you'll have to use it daily. After several weeks, your doctor will likely recommend that you only use these medications twice a week to prevent a recurrence.

Other Therapies:

- Apply lubricant (i.e. petroleum jelly, A and D ointment, Aquaphor) to the affected area.
- Ease burning and pain with oatmeal solutions, sitz baths, ice packs or cool compresses.
- Take an oral antihistamine (i.e. diphenhydramine, loratadine) at bedtime to help control the itching as you try to sleep.