

LICHEN SCLEROSUS

What is Lichen Sclerosus?

Lichen sclerosus is a benign and progressive skin disease that most often affects the genital area. This chronic skin condition cannot be cured but can be controlled. Lichen sclerosus is marked by itching and pain in the genital area. The skin near the opening of the vagina becomes thin and inflamed. The skin disorder is common in women after menopause. The condition is not contagious.

Skin Problems

Lichen sclerosus can develop on any skin surface, but it usually occurs in the vulva. The condition can make the opening of the vagina smaller so that sexual intercourse becomes painful. Bleeding may also occur if the skin becomes very thin. This thin skin can tear easily and may be accompanied by red or purple bruises. Skin scarring may also occur with lichen sclerosus.

Lichen sclerosus of the genital skin should be treated, as it can cause problems with urination or sex. There is also a small chance that skin cancer will develop at the site affected by lichen sclerosus. Lichen sclerosus can be treated with topical ointments or creams, and the symptoms should clear up in a few weeks.

Symptoms

If you have a mild case of lichen sclerosus, you may not experience any symptoms. Symptomatic lichen sclerosus may cause an itching feeling, pain during urination, or pain during intercourse. You may also experience vaginal or vulva bleeding.

What Causes Lichen Sclerosus?

It is not known what causes lichen sclerosus. Some health care providers believe that it is caused by an overactive immune system or a hormonal imbalance. Genetic or inherited factors may play a role in its development. It is not contagious. Lichen sclerosus may appear on skin that is damaged or scarred from a previous injury. In women, the condition most commonly occurs after menopause.

How is Lichen Sclerosus Treated?

With proper treatment and follow up, lichen sclerosus can be effectively controlled. Treatment begins with seeking medical care from your health care provider. A small sample (biopsy) of the affected skin may be removed and sent to the lab for analysis.

Ointments or creams are applied directly to the affected area for symptom relief.

What you can do to improve your Lichen Sclerosus?

Follow your health care provider's instructions and take all medications as prescribed. In addition, you can speed up your recovery by:

- Avoiding long term use of topical ointments or creams that can thin the skin
- Avoiding scratching the area
- Consulting with your health care provider if symptoms persist after treatment
- Using a vaginal lubricant during intercourse to reduce friction
- Washing the genital area gently with plain water or with a non-soap cleanser

What are the potential complications of Lichen Sclerosus?

Complications of lichen sclerosus include:

- Dyspareunia (painful sexual intercourse)
- Dysuria (difficulty urinating)
- Embarrassment
- Small increased risk of skin cancer