



Hidradenitis Suppurativa

What is hidradenitis suppurativa (HS)?

Hidradenitis suppurativa is a skin condition that can cause inflammation, discomfort, and scarring. Symptoms usually start around the time of puberty. HS commonly appears as red, painful lumps – sometimes called “boils” - just under the skin. They are usually found under the arms, under the breasts, or in the groin. These come from blocked hair follicles and sweat glands. Sometimes these boils have openings at the skin surface that drain foul-smelling liquid. They can become smaller and less painful with time and treatment, but often become inflamed and swollen again or develop into large, deep scars. Boils and abscesses tend to come back in the same locations.

HS is more common in women, especially those who are obese, of African descent, and who smoke cigarettes. It has been associated with other medical conditions, such as diabetes. For some women, HS flares are associated with their menstrual cycles. HS can cause emotional distress due to the associated pain, and long-term changes to skin appearance.

What causes HS?

The cause of hidradenitis is not fully known. It might be related to genetics, hormone levels, or a strong immune system response to bacteria that normally live on our skin. Hair follicles and sweat glands can become blocked and swollen before breaking open, which can cause more inflammation. HS is not due to a bacterial infection so you cannot spread it to others. However, with skin breaking open, infections can develop. Although it is not the primary cause, friction (such as clothes rubbing on the area) can make HS worse.

How is HS diagnosed?

A healthcare provider usually diagnoses HS based on your history, symptoms, and an examination of your skin in the affected areas. People with HS may have deep cysts or abscesses, recurrent boil-like lumps, and areas of scarring under the arms, breasts or in the groin. There are currently no blood tests or imaging that can diagnose HS.

How is HS treated?

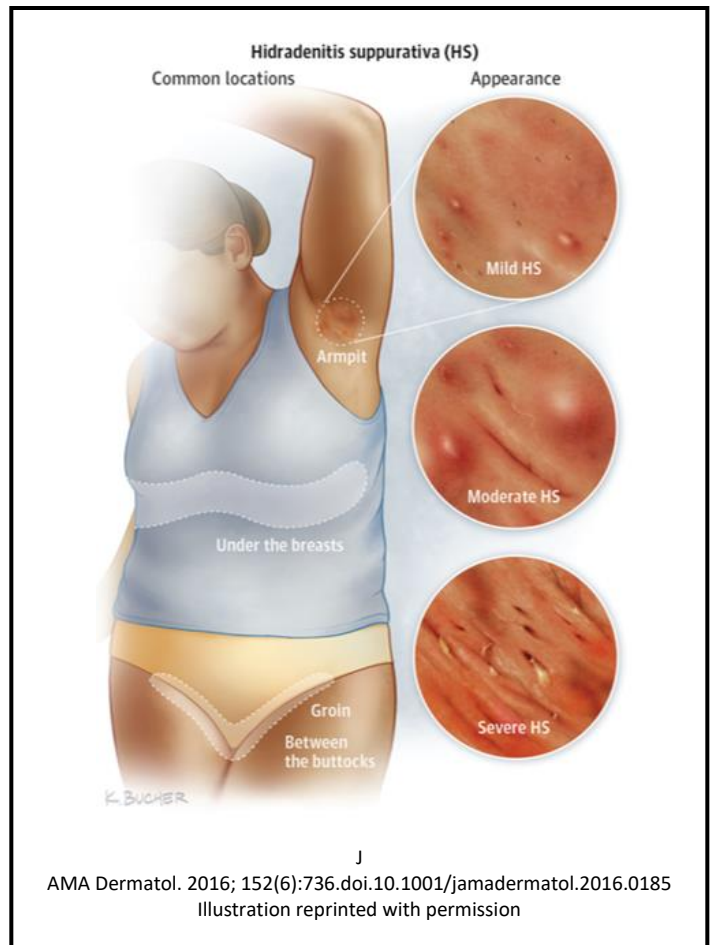
There are several ways of treating the symptoms of HS:

- With medications –
 - Topical or oral antibiotics can be used for a few weeks to minimize flares and discomfort.
 - For HS flares that are worse during your menstrual periods, combination birth control pills (with both estrogen and progestin) can help. Progesterone-only options may worsen HS.
 - Medications that suppress a part of the immune system may be used for severe HS that does not improve with other medications
- With surgery –
 - For some HS, boils that continue to return and have not improved with medications, surgical removal of the involved area can be helpful.
 - A healthcare provider may recommend a procedure called incision and drainage for severe, painful abscesses

Your healthcare provider may also refer you to a dermatologist.

How can I improve my HS symptoms or prevent HS from coming back?

- Wear loose-fitting, absorbent clothing and underwear without seams or underwire
- Avoid pads; if you can't, avoid scented pads and liners
- If you're overweight or obese, healthy weight loss may help
- Quit smoking and vaping (nicotine use)
- Avoid genital shaving
- Wash affected area with unscented soaps gently without scrubbing
- Talk with your healthcare provider about your symptoms and concerns



This document was created and approved by the NASPAG Education Committee October 2022