



## Lichen Sclerosus

### What is lichen sclerosis?

Lichen sclerosis is a skin condition that can affect the labia (folds of skin outside of the vagina) at any age. It can be diagnosed in children before the menstrual cycle starts. It is more common in adults who have stopped having periods.

### What causes lichen sclerosis?

The exact cause of lichen sclerosis is unknown. It is thought to be an autoimmune condition. Autoimmune conditions are diseases where the body unexpectedly attacks itself.

### What are the symptoms of lichen sclerosis?

It can appear in many different ways. People sometimes complain of itching or pain in the genital area. They may also have pain with urination or with bowel movements. Some people report seeing blood in their underwear. There may be a delay in the diagnosis of lichen sclerosis because it shows up in so many different ways.

### How is lichen sclerosis diagnosed?

Lichen sclerosis is usually diagnosed based on history and physical exam. There is often a classic appearance of the genital area where the skin is white or lighter in color in a figure of eight shape around the labia and the anus. Bruising and small cuts may be seen when lichen sclerosis is more severe. A biopsy of the skin is sometimes needed to help make the diagnosis.

### How is lichen sclerosis treated?

There are two treatment goals for lichen sclerosis:

The first goal is to treat the symptoms. The healthcare provider may recommend creams/ointments or oral medications to ease the pain or itching.

The second goal is to stop the autoimmune action. Most patients are treated with a prescription strength steroid cream/ointment. The healthcare provider will give instructions on how the medication is to be used on the skin. Some children are able to do this on their own but others will need help from their parents/caregivers. If the steroid cream/ointment does not work, a different type of medication can be used; this cream/ointment is often used in patients with eczema.

In addition to medical treatment, it is important to practice good hygiene to prevent irritation of the genital area. Use a mild, unscented soap or plain water to clean the genital area and dry the area thoroughly and gently. Avoid irritating substances like bubble baths. After bathing, you can apply petroleum jelly or similar product recommended by your healthcare provider.

### Can lichen sclerosis come back?

Once treatment is completed, it is hoped that the symptoms go away and the affected skin returns to a normal appearance.

Lichen sclerosis can be a long-lasting problem with symptoms that come and go even after menstrual cycles start. Often long-term treatment with topical steroids is required to prevent it from coming back.

### Can lichen sclerosis cause cancer?

Although post menopausal patients with lichen sclerosis may be at higher risk of vulvar cancer, this is unlikely in children. It is important for those with lichen sclerosis to be closely followed by their healthcare provider.