

ADVANCED OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY, LLC.

LICHEN SCLEROSIS:

Lichen sclerosis is a long-term problem of the skin. It mostly affects the genital and anal areas but can also appear on other parts of the body. Similar to other skin conditions, there are treatments available to help the symptoms.

What is lichen sclerosis and what does it look like?

Lichen sclerosis (LS) is a skin condition that makes the vulva look white, slightly shiny, and smooth. The skin's surface becomes thin and delicate so that it tears easily. This can cause bleeding under the skin. In severe cases of lichen sclerosis of the genital area, scarring can occur. This causes the inner lips of the vulva to get smaller. The clitoris can become covered in scar tissue.

What causes lichen sclerosis?

We do not know the exact cause of lichen sclerosis. Since lichen sclerosis is not caused by an infection, it cannot be spread and *is not contagious*.

What are the symptoms of lichen sclerosis?

Symptoms of lichen sclerosis may be different from one person to another and can be mild to severe.

Women who have this disease may experience some or all of the following symptoms in the vulvar area:

- mild to severe itching in the vulvar area
- skin that appears fragile, pale, and/or white
- bruised skin with broken blood vessels or "blood blisters"
- small tears or fissures in the skin
- scar tissue covering the labia or clitoris
- bleeding or tearing of skin when having bowel movements or sexual relations

How is lichen sclerosis diagnosed?

Most of the time, doctors who see a lot of patients with lichen sclerosis can often make the diagnosis just by looking at the skin, but still may need to do a biopsy.

Will I need treatment?

Even if you do not have symptoms such as itching or pain, it is important for you to receive medical treatment for lichen sclerosis. Treatment to genital skin is necessary to try to prevent scarring of the vulva. Without treatment, there can be scarring that causes parts of the vulva to narrow and cause problems with passing urine or pain with sexual activity.

Are there medicines to treat lichen sclerosis?

Yes. Medications given in topical creams are available to help with the symptoms of lichen sclerosis. The medication reduces swelling and itching on your skin. Your doctor will probably tell you to initially apply this drug every day so that your skin can return to its normal surface and strength. It is important to realize that the treatment may not undo the scarring that may have already occurred. Typically after the active skin condition is controlled, you will use the topical medication once or twice a week indefinitely to prevent an exacerbation.

Will I need surgery?

Most of the time, the prescription medicine works to control symptoms and return your skin to normal and surgery is not needed.

Does lichen sclerosis cause cancer?

Lichen sclerosis is not skin cancer. However, scientists have found that skin that has been scarred from lichen sclerosis is more likely to develop skin cancer. This is why it is so important for people who have this skin disorder to receive proper treatment. Regular check-ups are needed so your doctor can watch skin changes, treat your symptoms, and be alert to early signs of skin cancer