

Lichen Sclerosus

**Obstetrics & Gynaecology
Women & Children's Services**

This leaflet has been designed to give you important information about your condition / procedure, and to answer some common queries you may have.

Information for patients and visitors

Introduction

This leaflet is to understand about Lichen sclerosus. It tells you about this condition, what causes it, what can be done about it and about support groups available.

What is Lichen Sclerosus?

Lichen sclerosus is a skin condition which most commonly affects the genital skin of women. Less commonly it affect other areas of skin. It is estimated that Lichen sclerosus affects about 1:1000 women.

What are the symptoms of Lichen Sclerosus?

Majority of the patients have no symptoms, but most common symptom of Lichen Sclerosus is itching. In a typical case small pearly white spots develop on the vulva, which are usually itchy. In about 3 in 10 cases, the skin around opening of back passage (anus) is also affected. Typically the itch and irritation becomes persistent and distressing. The itch tends to be worse at night.

Overtime white spots become larger and whole vulva and anal skin become white and more fragile. The fragile skin may become inflamed, raw and prone to painful splitting and cracking. It may become painful to have sex. The scar-like process can tighten the skin and make the entrance to vagina narrow. Symptoms may slowly get worse.

What causes Lichen Sclerosus?

The cause is not known. Sometimes it is associated with diseases in which body's immune system attacks normal tissues, such as thyroid gland or insulin producing cells in the pancreas. In people with Lichen Sclerosus the genital skin may be attacked by some parts of immune system which then cause inflammation.

Is Lichen Sclerosus hereditary?

No. Rarely Lichen Sclerosus can occur in relatives.

Are there any complications from Lichen Sclerosus?

The itch and discomfort may cause distress. The changes to genital skin may cause sexual difficulties or problems in passing urine. There is also a small increased risk of developing cancer of the vulva. The exact risk is not known but it is thought 4 in 100 women with Lichen Sclerosus develop this cancer.

Cancer of the vulva is an uncommon complication. If you have any lumps or non-healing ulcers in that area, you should report to your GP or contact the secretary of the Gynaecologist who you have your follow up with.



Information for patients and visitors

How is Lichen Sclerosus diagnosed?

Diagnosis of Lichen Sclerosus can usually be made from typical appearance of the condition. If there is any doubt, small sample (biopsy) of affected skin may be taken under Local anaesthesia and examined. The skin margins after biopsy are put together using dissolvable stitch. This can confirm the diagnosis and rule out other disorders which can sometimes mimic this condition.

Can Lichen Sclerosus be cured?

No treatment is likely to reverse the changes of Lichen Sclerosus completely, but symptoms and signs of the disease can be well controlled by steroid application.

How can Lichen Sclerosus be treated?

Your symptoms can be relieved by the use of regular steroids for 2-3 months and further control of the symptoms with only occasional application.

Practical Tips

- Avoid bubble baths, scented soap, detergents, perfumes etc to the vulva. These may irritate the skin and make symptoms worse. Use plain water or an emollient (moisturising) wash such as aqueous cream instead
- Avoid rubbing or scratching the area
- Ensure you dry the genital area after passing urine to avoid irritation of the skin
- Apply barrier cream or ointment such as petroleum jelly after washing and before and after passing water
- Avoid tight clothes and wear underwear made of natural fibres such as cotton or silk
- If you find sex painful it may help to use lubricants or a vaginal dilator

Where can I get more information about Lichen Sclerosus?

Links to patient support groups.

NLSSG – National LS support group

www.lichenscelorus.org

Email; admin @lichenscelorus.org

Helpline; 07765947599

Web links to detailed leaflets:

www.niams.nih.gov/Health-info/lichen-sclerosus

<http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/1123316>



Information for patients and visitors

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lichen-sclerosus/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://dermetnz.org/immune/lichen-sclerosus.html>

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service offers confidential advice, support and information on any health related matters.

If you have a comment, concern, complaint or compliment about the care or service you have received from the Trust you can contact the PALS team as follows:

Telephone: 03033 306518

Email: nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

There are also offices at both the Diana Princess of Wales Hospital (near the main entrance) and Scunthorpe General Hospital (on the C Floor, near the outpatient department), should you wish to visit.

Please note: PALS should not be contacted for clinical advice relating to the content of this leaflet. The service should be contacted directly in the first instance.

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