Lichen Sclerosus

Lichen sclerosus is a skin problem that can happen on any part of the body, including the genital areas. Lichen sclerosus is not an infection or a fungus. There are 4 ways that lichen sclerosus can change your skin.
Your skin may have:

- Thin, white areas (this is the most common).
- Thickened white areas.
- Irritated (red and swollen) patches.
- Tears or cracks.

All 4 changes can happen at the same time.

Lichen sclerosus happens more often in women who have gone through menopause (the change). It can happen at any age. It can happen in children.

WHAT CAUSES LICHEN SCLEROSUS?

The cause of lichen sclerosus is not known. It may be an autoimmune illness. An **autoimmune** illness means your body's antibodies (which it makes to fight off infection), attack your own skin. It is **not** passed from one person to another. This means it is **not** passed:

- To a baby during birth.
- By touching.
- Having sex with someone who has lichen sclerosus.

Other family members may also have lichen sclerosus. They cannot give it to anyone else either.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I HAVE LICHEN SCLEROSUS?

- Itching that may be mild, or very bad.
- Sores or tears in your skin caused by scratching.
- Bruised skin with small broken blood vessels.
- Flat or no inner lips of the vulva.
- Narrowing of the opening of the vagina, which may cause pain during sex.

These symptoms will be different in each person. They may get better or worse at different times. For example, they may be worse in the summer when you sweat more and the moisture irritates your skin.

HOW WILL MY DOCTOR CHECK FOR LICHEN SCLEROSUS?

Your doctor will look for vulvar or other skin changes. Sometimes, a biopsy or small sample of skin may be sent for testing. Lichen sclerosus does not cause skin cancer. But there have been cases of skin cancer growing in the same places as lichen sclerosus.

TREATMENT

Lichen sclerosus often lasts a long time. But it can be controlled with treatment. Mild scarring of the skin often happens. Treatment can usually keep you from having bad scarring, which can narrow the opening of the vagina.
You may be treated in any of the following ways.

- **Vulvar or other skin care**. Keep the vulvar/vaginal or other areas as clean and dry as possible.
- **Steroid ointment**. Put a thin layer of steroid ointment over the vulvar or other areas with lichen sclerosus. This will lessen:
  - Redness.
  - Swelling.
  - Itching.
  - Burning.

Use only as your doctor tells you to. Using too much or too often can thin the skin and make problems worse.

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