

What is Lichen Sclerosus?

Lichen Sclerosus is quite an uncommon condition of the skin which causes skin to become thinner and lose its colour. It can affect women of all ages, including girls who have not yet reached puberty. Lichen Sclerosus often affects the skin of the vulva which is the area of skin around the entrance of the vagina. Lichen Sclerosus can cause vulval skin to itch and you may have red or white patches on the skin. The vulva skin can split and bleed and become uncomfortable or sore. You may have had these problems for some time, perhaps years. The area can be slightly more prone to infections such as thrush (Candida). It is important that you continue with your treatment to relieve the symptoms and then to maintain the improvement and to keep the skin as healthy as possible. The reason why some women develop Lichen Sclerosus is not fully understood, but it is known not to be contagious and it cannot be passed to partners through sexual contact.

What treatment will I have for Lichen Sclerosus?

The treatment for Lichen Sclerosus involves the use of steroid ointment or cream and importantly the care of the vulval skin with emollients which moisturise and protect the skin. You will be given directions for the use of the prescribed treatments at the clinic and we hope these will soon improve your symptoms. It is important that you use steroid creams or ointment sparingly on the vulval skin, a 30g tube should last for 2 – 3 months.

How can I look after vulval skin?

The skin of the vulva is sensitive and all soaps and detergents should be avoided in this area. You can use your emollient cream (for example: aqueous cream, 50:50 and emulsifying ointment) to wash yourself, as well as using moisturiser. You can wash the vulval area with warm water and the emollient cream. You may be more comfortable wearing loose cotton underwear and if it is convenient in your own home to wear no pants under a dress or skirt. It is advisable not to use personal deodorant or any creams other than those prescribed by your Doctor. Avoid perfumed bubble baths, oils and biological washing powders. When the Lichen Sclerosus symptoms have cleared you can help to keep it under control with daily care of the vulval skin and sparing use of steroid creams. You will be given advice on how to reduce the amount of steroid preparation by the Doctor in the clinic. If you think you may have unwanted side effects from medication then you should see your GP for advice on stopping that treatment. If sexual intercourse is painful a lubricant may be helpful.

How often will I need to come to the clinic?

You will be given an appointment to come back to the joint Gynaecology/Dermatology Clinic to allow the doctor to check on the progress of your symptoms and for her to give you further advice about your treatment. You will be seen at regular intervals to enable the Doctor to examine the vulval skin and to help you maintain healthy vulval skin. We hope to be able to help you to keep the symptoms of Lichen Sclerosus under control.

Ref: British Dermatological Association, www.bad.org.uk, 2001