

Lichen Sclerosus

What Is It?

Lichen Sclerosus (LS) is a skin condition that mainly affects the vulval and perianal area. It is more common in women and although it can occur at any age it tends to affect older women. The cause of lichen sclerosus is unknown however, there may be a genetic link.

Signs And Symptoms Of Lichen Sclerosus

- itching
- soreness
- splitting of the vulva skin
- 'shrinking' (atrophy) of the vulval area
- pain and difficulties with sexual intercourse
- narrowing of the vaginal opening
- fusion of the labia, clitoris and urethra

Diagnosis

Diagnosis can be difficult. Patients are sometimes misdiagnosed and treated for thrush. Referral to a specialist is usually necessary and a skin biopsy may be taken. Lichen Sclerosus is sometimes only discovered when examination takes place for other disorders.

Treatment

There is no cure for lichen sclerosus. Treatment aims to control the itching and protect the skin from damage. Try to avoid wearing tight clothing. Gentle cleansing with water and non-irritating soaps is also important. Powerful steroid creams are usually effective at controlling irritation. A three-month course of graduated steroids brings symptoms under control. After this, you may find that you are symptom-free for quite some time. Some women find that the symptoms return when they stop the creams and may need to use a maintenance dose of steroid cream from time to time. Several follow-up appointments will be needed to see the response to treatment.