



**Health Professionals  
Committed to the  
Reproductive Needs of  
Children and Adolescents**

## Lichen Sclerosus

### What is lichen sclerosus?

Lichen sclerosus is a skin problem that can affect all women. It can be diagnosed in young girls before the menstrual cycle starts. It is more often seen in older women who have stopped having periods.

### What causes lichen sclerosus?

The exact cause of lichen sclerosus is unknown. It is thought to be an autoimmune condition. Autoimmune conditions are diseases where the body attacks itself unexpectedly.

### What are the symptoms of lichen sclerosus?

Girls can present in many different ways. They sometimes complain of itching or pain in the genital area. Other times they complain of pain with urination or with bowel movements. Finally, bleeding in the underwear can occur. Because girls can present in so many different ways, this can lead to a delay in the diagnosis of lichen sclerosus.

### How do doctors diagnose lichen sclerosus?

Lichen sclerosus is usually diagnosed with a complete history and physical exam. Girls often have a classic appearance of the genital area where the skin is white (or lighter in color) in a figure of eight shape around the labia (the female "lips") and the anus. When lichen sclerosus is more severe, bruising and small cuts may be seen. At times a biopsy of this skin may be needed to help with making the diagnosis.

### How is lichen sclerosus treated?

The treatment of lichen sclerosus is divided into two goals.

The first goal is to treat the symptoms. The doctor may recommend creams or oral medications to relieve the pain or itching.

The second goal is to treat the lichen sclerosus by stopping the autoimmune action. Most patients are treated with a strong steroid cream. The doctor will give instructions on how the cream is to be applied to the skin. Some girls are able to do this on their own but others will need help from their parents. If the steroid cream does not work, a different type of cream can be used. This type of cream is also often used in patients with eczema and can also lower the autoimmune activity.

After treatment, the doctor would like for the symptoms to resolve and for the affected skin to return to a normal appearance.

### Can lichen sclerosus come back?

Lichen sclerosus can be a chronic problem with symptoms that come and go even after menstrual cycles start. All patients should be observed by a doctor for the return of symptoms or skin changes. If left untreated, it can cause permanent scarring.

### Can lichen sclerosus cause cancer?

Older women with lichen sclerosus are at a higher risk of having vulvar cancer. It is unknown if children have the same risk. That is why it is important for girls with lichen sclerosus to be followed by the doctor closely.