

Lichen Sclerosis

Gynaecology

You have been told that you have Lichen Sclerosus on the vulva (the skin of the outer genitals). This is a chronic skin condition that causes white, shiny and tight patches on the skin. The condition can occur at any age, but it is most often seen in women in middle age. In this folder you can read more about Lichen Sclerosus.

Causes

The exact cause of Lichen Sclerosus is not known. It is likely that an autoimmune reaction plays a role. The condition can occur together with other autoimmune diseases, such as:

- Diabetes
- Thyroid disorders
- Lupus (SLE)
- Scleroderma
- Vitiligo
- Certain types of anaemia

Symptoms

The main symptom is severe itching of the vulva. Other symptoms that may occur include:

- A burning or painful sensation
- Small blood blisters or sores, often caused by scratching
- Thickening of the skin
- White, shiny patches that feel tight
- Small cracks or fissures

Over time, changes to the vulva may occur, such as:

- Fusion of the labia (inner or outer vaginal lips)
- Narrowing of the urethra, which can make urination more difficult
- The clitoris becoming less visible because it is covered by the surrounding skin
- Narrowing of the vaginal opening, which may make sexual intercourse painful
- An increased occurrence of infections, such as yeast infections

There is a slightly increased risk of developing vulvar skin cancer in areas affected by lichen sclerosus (approximately 5%). For this reason, an annual check-up is important. Lichen sclerosus can also occur on other parts of the body, such as the arms, shoulders, or back. Children can develop this condition as well.

Self-examination

It is important to monitor your skin for any changes. You can do this by regularly examining your vulva using a mirror. We recommend performing this self-examination once every 1 to 2 months.

By becoming familiar with the normal appearance of your skin, you will be more likely to notice any changes at an early stage and discuss them with your doctor or GP.

Diagnosis

In most cases, the doctor can recognise the condition through a physical examination. Sometimes the diagnosis is confirmed with a biopsy. In this procedure, a small sample of tissue is taken under local anaesthetic and examined in a laboratory.

Treatment

Lichen sclerosus cannot be cured, but the symptoms can often be managed effectively. Treatment focuses on reducing itching, pain, and inflammation. The main treatment consists of a corticosteroid cream, which you apply to the affected areas of the skin according to the treatment schedule provided by your doctor. You will also use an emollient ointment (moisturising ointment) to keep the skin soft and supple.

Surgery is almost never necessary, but it may sometimes be performed to separate fused labia or to widen the opening of the urethra. Surgery may also be considered to reduce symptoms caused by scar tissue.

Emergency after visiting DC Klinieken

In case of an emergency, call: 088 0100 998.

Insurance

DC Klinieken has contracts with all health insurers. This means that almost all care is reimbursed, just like in the hospital. You do need a referral from your (general) doctor. Please be aware of your own deductible. More information about reimbursements and possible exceptions can be found at: www.dcklinieken.nl/vergoedingen.

Questions

For more information and answers to frequently asked questions, go to: www.dcklinieken.nl/contact or contact our Service and Information Centre at 088 0100 900.