

Let's Talk About...

Genital Lichen Sclerosis

Lichen sclerosis (LYE-ken sklah-ROW-sis) is a condition that causes thin and patchy white skin. This skin disorder most often affects the skin around the anus, foreskin of the penis, and skin of the vulva. However, lichen sclerosis can affect skin anywhere on your child's body.

What causes lichen sclerosis?

Doctors do not know exactly what causes lichen sclerosis. Your child may be more likely to have lichen sclerosis if family members also have it. Lichen sclerosis may also be caused by hormone problems or an immune system that is too active.

What are the symptoms of lichen sclerosis?

You will notice small white spots on your child's skin that grow into bigger patches. The patches then become crinkled and thin and can tear easily. Your child's skin may also have bright red or purple bruises and become scarred. Common symptoms include itching, bleeding, and bruising (in severe lichen sclerosis).

If your child has a mild case of lichen sclerosis, however, they may have no symptoms.

How is lichen sclerosis diagnosed?

Your child's doctor will examine the skin for lichen sclerosis. They may also take a patch of skin (called a biopsy) and look at it under a microscope.

How is lichen sclerosis treated?

Mild lichen sclerosis may go away on its own. If your child has lichen sclerosis on or around the genital area or anus, the doctor may prescribe corticosteroids. These ointments or creams can help reduce itching and improve the condition of the skin.

Follow the doctor's instructions when applying steroid creams. After several weeks, your child should only use the creams twice a week to avoid further skin thinning.

Your child's doctor may prescribe ultraviolet light treatment for non-genital areas. They may also recommend circumcision (removing the foreskin of the penis) for boys with lichen sclerosis on the genitals. The doctor generally suggests this only when corticosteroids do not work.

Ask your child's doctor about follow-up visits to check the skin. They will usually suggest follow-up exams every 6–12 months.

How can I help my child with lichen sclerosis?

Make sure your child is using the corticosteroid creams as prescribed. Watch for any changes in the skin, and tell your child's doctor if the condition seems to get worse. You should also let the doctor know about any medicines or over-the-counter treatments your child takes.

What if I have questions about lichen sclerosis?

If you have questions about your child's lichen sclerosis or are worried the condition is getting worse, contact your child's doctor for a follow-up appointment.

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