



Patient & Family Guide  
2021

# Lichen Sclerosus



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Lichen Sclerosus

## What is lichen sclerosus?

Lichen sclerosus is a life-long condition that creates patchy white areas on your skin. It may affect any part of the body, but most often involves the skin of the vulva (opening to the vagina) and around the anus. Anyone can get lichen sclerosus, but post-menopausal women are at highest risk.

## What causes lichen sclerosus?

- The exact cause of lichen sclerosus is not known. Doctors believe it is associated with diseases where the body's immune system attacks normal tissue.
- Sometimes, lichen sclerosus can appear on skin that has been damaged or scarred in a past injury.
- Lichen sclerosus does **not** spread from person to person and does **not** usually run in families.

## **What are the symptoms of lichen sclerosis?**

- The most common symptom is for the affected area to be itchy, but you may not notice any symptoms. In later stages, you may have discomfort or pain, bleeding from skin that tears easily, or bruising.
- Skin that is affected by lichen sclerosis is usually white and has a fine, crinkled texture.
- Lichen sclerosis can cause scarring if not treated. This scarring can thin the inner lips of the vulva and narrow the vagina, which may make sex painful and urination (peeing) harder.

## **How is lichen sclerosis diagnosed?**

Lichen sclerosis is diagnosed by a health care provider during an exam.

If needed, they may take a very small piece of skin to be looked at closely under a microscope. This is called a punch biopsy.

## How is lichen sclerosis treated?

- Treatment usually starts with putting very strong medicated ointment on the affected skin. As the area heals, lower strength medicated ointments will be prescribed. You may see your health care provider less often as the area heals.
- With treatment, the condition will get better. However, there is no cure for lichen sclerosis and you will need treatment **for the rest of your life**.
- Scarring caused by the condition may never heal.

## Do I need a follow-up appointment?

- Yes, you will need to see your health care provider regularly to monitor your response to treatment.
- After your skin condition starts to heal, follow up with your doctor:
  - › every 6 to 12 months to check for any side effects from the medicated ointment or
  - › if the area gets worse.

- These follow-up visits are also important to check for any early signs of skin cancer. **Lichen sclerosus does not cause cancer.** But skin that is scarred by lichen sclerosus has a small increased risk of developing skin cancer. Regular routine follow-up is important.

### **For more information:**

- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases:
  - › [www.niams.nih.gov/health\\_Info/Lichen\\_Sclerosus](http://www.niams.nih.gov/health_Info/Lichen_Sclerosus)
- British Association of Dermatologists:
  - › [www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets/lichen-sclerosus](http://www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets/lichen-sclerosus)

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

## **Appointments and questions**

To confirm or reschedule a Clinic appointment, please call 902-473-6112. If you have any questions or concerns, you may call the Clinic at the number above.

### **Clinic nurse:**

- › Phone: 902-473-4181
- › Hours: Monday to Friday,  
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Please note: your call may not be returned until the next business day.

**If you cannot reach the Colposcopy Clinic, see your primary health care provider or call 811.**

**In an emergency, call 911 or visit your nearest Emergency Department.**

**Colposcopy Clinic**  
5th floor, Dickson Building  
5820 University Avenue  
Victoria General Hospital site,  
Halifax, NS B3H 1V7

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**Looking for more health information?**

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.

