

LICHEN SIMPLEX CHRONICUS

What is Lichen simplex Chronicus?

This skin condition is caused by chronic scratching. Lichen Simplex Chronicus (LSC) is very itchy, and as a result of the constant scratching, the skin gets thickened, and then itches more, creating a itch-scratch-itch cycle. It is associated most commonly with eczema, psoriasis and/or a contact dermatitis.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Chronic itching and/or burning of the vulva.
- Waking up at night scratching
- Skin that is pink to dusky red or purple color
- Swollen or thickened skin that may look white
- Thick skin with increase skin markings (skin is like leather) – lichenification
- Skin cuts and abrasions from scratching, that may cause weeping and crusting on the skin
- Raw wounded skin
- **Heat sweating stress and menstruation often make the symptoms worse**

What causes LSC?

The most common causes are eczema or a skin irritant. There are many things that may irritate the vulvar skin. These may start the problem or keep it going.

- Laundry detergents
- Fabric softeners/dryer sheets
- Panty liners/pads
- Adult or baby wipes
- Scented, colored toilet paper
- Feminine anti-itch creams
- Bath soaps, lotions
- Excessive washing
- Bubble baths, oils
- Feminine sprays, powders perfumes
- Douches
- Condoms with lubricants or spermicides
- Contraceptive jellies, creams, foams, sponges
- Tight clothes, thongs, synthetic underwear or panty hose

Once the skin is open and weeping, it is easily infected and this causes more irritation.

How is LSC diagnosed?

Your health care provider will take a detailed history of everything that you have been doing and using on your skin. She will examine your vulva carefully for skin changes that are seen with this condition. Sometimes a small sample of the typical skin (biopsy) will be taken for diagnosis. Skin swabs and vaginal discharge may be examined to look for infections. Patch testing may be suggested to check for specific allergies.

What is the treatment for LCS?

The goal is to break the “itch-scratch-itch” cycle, so the skin will heal. This condition develops over a period of time and it will take some time for it to get better. Scratching tears the skin and must stop or the skin will not heal.

Stop all irritation

- Gentle hygiene/washing only with little to no soap. Use no face cloths etc.
- Wear loose, cool clothes, avoid synthetic fabrics
- Keep fingernails short or wear white gloves to bed

Heal the skin

- Cool/lukewarm compresses, Sitz bath or tub for 5-10 minutes twice a day to start. This will hydrate the skin and soothe it. After soaking, seal in moisture with a thin film of plain Vaseline/petroleum jelly or plain mineral oil
- Treat infection with antibiotics and anti-yeast medication
- Stop inflammation with a topical steroid ointment used twice a day for 2 weeks then decrease as instructed
- Antihistamines or sedatives may be given at night.
- For severe itching, a corticosteroid injection may be given.

****Remember that it may take several weeks for the skin to improve. It is fairly common for the itching to flare up once in a while. Do not be discouraged if it recurs. You will learn what you need to do to help prevent relapses. ****