

Factsheet 10 facts on lichen sclerosus in women (for the public)

1. It is a genital skin disease and can also affect men and children.
2. It is estimated to affect up to 3% of the adult female population.
3. The commonest symptoms are itching, pain, tearing/cracking of the skin and painful sex.
4. The cause of lichen sclerosus is not fully understood.
5. Without treatment the skin can look white, bruised, scarred and shrunken.
6. The condition should be diagnosed by a doctor such as a GP or hospital specialist, for example a dermatologist or gynaecologist. We would avoid self-diagnosis and treatment.
7. Effective treatment is with the regular application of strong steroid ointments (to suppress the skin inflammation), emollients (to keep the skin hydrated and act as a barrier) and good skincare (to avoid irritation by, for example, feminine hygiene products, wet wipes, talcum powder etc.). Approximately 8 out of 10 patients have an excellent response to this approach.
8. The long-term use of topical steroids on an intermittent basis can maintain symptom control in most women without causing any side effects.
9. There is a small cancer risk but this risk is low, affecting approximately 3% of women who have had lichen sclerosus over many years.
10. The condition can be misdiagnosed. Patients with the symptoms outlined above should have a medical history taken and an examination by a qualified health professional who is able to make a diagnosis. A small skin sample (biopsy) may need to be taken and examined under a microscope to confirm the diagnosis.