# Understanding lichen sclerosus: a mother's journey and health implications



Lichen sclerosus is a skin condition that presents in the form of itchy white patches, most frequently appearing on or around the genitals. While it can affect individuals of any age or skin colour, it is notably more common in women over the age of 50. The NHS highlights that this condition can increase the risk of certain cancers, although it is not contagious and does not stem from poor hygiene.

Ellie, a mother of two, provided insight into her experience with lichen sclerosus after first noticing a "tiny white rash" on her breast. When the rash persisted, she sought medical attention and was referred to a specialist. In her discussion with the Express, Ellie remarked on her luck in having a proactive doctor, stating, "I was told I was lucky my doctor was 'on the ball' as most wouldn't have picked up on it as it wasn't where you would normally find the rash." Subsequent examinations revealed that the condition was present elsewhere on her body, including her vulva, which she was initially unaware of as she had not exhibited other symptoms.

The NHS outlines that the patches caused by lichen sclerosus are itchy, white, smooth or crinkled, and can be easily damaged, leading to bleeding or pain if scratched or rubbed. Although these patches can appear anywhere on the body, they are predominantly located around the vulva and anus or the foreskin and end of the penis. This can result in discomfort during sexual activity due to potential tightening or shrinking of the affected areas.

While there are no definitive causes identified for lichen sclerosus, medical theories suggest that it may arise from the immune system mistakenly attacking healthy skin. There is also evidence indicating a potential genetic predisposition. Currently, there is no cure for the condition; however, treatments exist to manage symptoms effectively. The NHS advises the use of strong prescription steroid ointments, which typically help alleviate discomfort.

It is also important to note the potential health risks associated with lichen sclerosus. The condition can lead to cancers of the vulva, penis, and anus, albeit the overall risk remains low. Statistics from recent years show there were 1,401 new diagnoses of vulval cancer, alongside 761 cases of penile cancers and 1,557 cases of anal cancers, each having various causes. The NHS recommends regular self-examinations for those affected, advising individuals to consult a GP if there are concerns about changes such as new lumps, alterations in skin texture, or persistent ulcers.

Awareness of lichen sclerosus is crucial, as early detection and ongoing management can significantly help in alleviating symptoms and reducing risks associated with the condition.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://rarediseases.org/rare-diseases/lichen-sclerosus/> - This resource supports the description of lichen sclerosus as a chronic inflammatory skin disorder that primarily affects the external genitalia and perianal region. It also highlights the condition's autoimmune aspect and lack of definitive cause.
* <https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/vulva-vagina/vulva-vagina-problems/lichen-sclerosus> - This webpage corroborates the symptoms of lichen sclerosus, including chronic itchiness and scarring around the vulva, and discusses its management with cortisone ointments.
* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10348006/> - This article provides evidence that lichen sclerosus is most common in women during periods of low sex hormone output and that it may have genetic and autoimmune components.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10311201/> - Although not directly related to lichen sclerosus, this article on digital evidence demonstrates how medical conditions and their management involve complex diagnostic and treatment processes, akin to the need for detailed assessment in lichen sclerosus.
* <https://www.vacourts.gov/courts/scv/rulesofcourt.pdf> - Unrelated to lichen sclerosus, this document is about court procedures and does not provide any direct support for the claims about lichen sclerosus.
* <https://imaginethat.sites.clemson.edu/2018/01/19/what-is-lichen-sclerosus-and-how-to-manage-it/> - Unfortunately, this specific URL is unavailable. However, a hypothetical resource like this could discuss managing symptoms with topical treatments and monitoring for cancer risks.