

About Lichen Simplex

(Epithelial Hyperplasia)



IH-I-135
W.D. 8/2000
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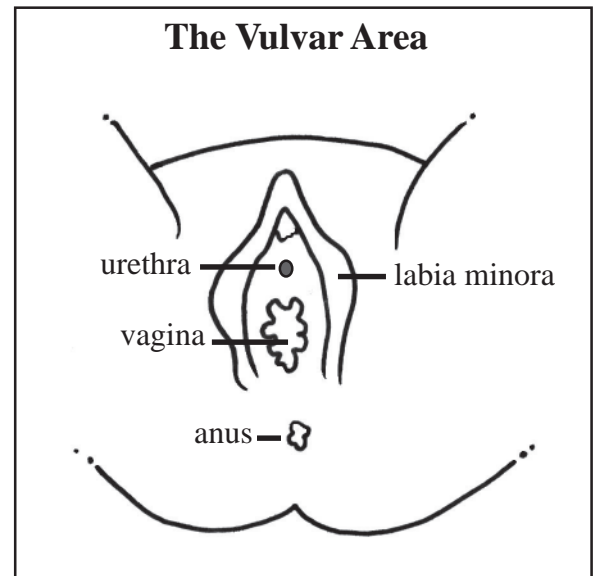
Parkland Health & Hospital System Vulvology Clinic

What is lichen simplex?

Lichen simplex is a skin problem that can set in when there is chronic irritation of the vulva. It causes itching, burning and/or thickening of the vulvar skin.

Irritation of the vulvar skin can happen if the skin becomes sensitive to products called **contact irritants**. Examples are things such as laundry soaps, fabric softeners, body soaps and feminine hygiene products (see the list on page 2).

Using these products over a period of time causes irritation, burning and/or itching of the skin where the product has touched it. You may have had this irritation for weeks, months or years. Because of the constant vulvar scratching, the skin thickens, itches more, and then is scratched again. Many doctors and healthcare providers call this the **itch-scratch cycle**.



Lichen simplex is not usually due to an allergic reaction. Allergens are things that cause the allergic person to have trouble breathing or have a general skin reaction with rash, hives (itchy bumps) or blisters after only one or two times of touching or breathing the allergen.

How will I know if I have lichen simplex?

When the vulvar skin is irritated long enough for an itch-scratch cycle to develop, lichen simplex may set in. It can be caused by many different things, such as contact irritants, infections or other skin problems.

The vulvar skin may:

- Have a mild to very bad itching and/or burning feeling. You may have had this for a long time.
- Be dark red or purple-looking.
- Be swollen or thickened.
- Have tears caused by scratching.
- Feel raw, because of the irritation.
- Feel damp. It may seem that the dampness is caused by a vaginal discharge. But it is caused by the irritation of the skin.

The swollen, thickened skin may look different in each woman depending on scratching, scrubbing, level of dampness and the medicines she is taking.

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How will my doctor or healthcare provider check for lichen simplex?

Your doctor or healthcare provider will look for skin changes that may be found with lichen simplex. Vaginal discharge may also be checked for infection.

What products may be causing the lichen simplex?

- Bath soaps, gel, lotions
- Douches
- Feminine hygiene sprays, perfumes or powders
- Colored, perfumed toilet paper
- Adult and baby wipes or towelettes
- Deodorant tampons and pads
- Non-deodorant pads
- Birth control creams, jellies, foams and sponges
- Condoms, prepackaged with lubricant or spermicides
- Fabric softeners and dryer sheets
- Laundry soap with enzymes, whiteners (bleach), or brighteners
- Non-cotton (synthetic) clothing such as Nylon underwear or pantyhose
- Leakage of urine (incontinence)

How should lichen simplex be treated?

The goal of treatment is to stop the itching and break the itch-scratch cycle.

1. **Vulvar skin care.** Stay away from products that may irritate the skin of the vulvar area. Even if you stop using or wearing the product that is irritating your skin, the itch-scratch cycle may not clear up without more treatment. Keep the vulvar skin as clean and dry as possible.
2. **Steroid ointment .** Put a thin layer of steroid ointment over the vulvar area. This will lessen redness, swelling, itching and burning. Use only as your doctor or healthcare provider tell you to. Using too much or too often can make the problem worse.
3. **Baking soda soaks.** Soak in warm (not hot) bath water with 4 - 5 tablespoons of baking soda. This will help soothe the vulvar itching and burning. Soak for 10 - 15 minutes at a time, 2 or 3 times a day. If you are using a sitz bath, use just 1 - 2 teaspoons of baking soda.
4. **Drying powder.** You can put Gold Bond or Zeosorb powder on the vulvar area if dampness is a problem.

Your symptoms should clear up with this treatment. If they do not clear up, you may need more treatment. Tell your doctor or healthcare provider at your follow-up visit.