

HIDRADENITIS SUPPURATIVA

What is hidradenitis suppurativa?

Hidradenitis suppurativa (also known as HS) is a condition where your body develops painful bumps and sores, usually over the armpits, groin and other folds of the body.

Why does hidradenitis suppurativa happen?

Although we don't know all the reasons why HS happens, it appears that the openings of the hair follicles get blocked leading to build-up of oil and dead skin cells with overgrowth of bacteria. This collection bursts in the skin and triggers the body's immune system, which leads to painful pus-filled bumps and scarring.

There can be an inherited component to HS and HS is more common in people with Down syndrome and in inflammatory bowel disease.

It is important to know that HS is not contagious and is not caused by bad hygiene.

How is hidradenitis suppurativa treated?

For all patients, it is important to minimize the friction on the skin and to limit inflammation. This can mean wearing looser clothing, losing weight and quitting smoking (as this can promote inflammation).

For painful lumps, your doctor can treat with a steroid injection. If the lump is cut open to drain, it unfortunately usually fills up again. However, this can be done if the lump is quite painful or looking like it will burst anyways.

Creams and washes that target bacteria can be used preventatively like over-the-counter 'benzoyl peroxide' and chlorhexidine washes or prescription dapsone gel, Biaclinol gel, clascoterone (Winlevi) cream and resorcinol 15% cream. If this doesn't work, antibiotic pills like doxycycline and a clindamycin/rifampin combo can be tried for 8-12 weeks.

Hormonal medication, like the oral contraceptive pill, can be used for females with HS and this can help, especially if the HS flares with the periods.

Oral vitamin A pills like isotretinoin or acitretin can be used to reduce the blockage in the hair follicles.

Injectable medication (called biologics) can also help. One called adalimumab is approved for Canadian children with HS who are over 12 years of age (80 mg to start and then 40 mg every other week). Another medication called secukinumab (which is used to treat kids over 6 years old with psoriasis) has been approved in Canada for adults with HS (but not children yet).

Other treatments include laser hair removal, Botox and surgery.

