

# Hidradenitis suppurativa (HS): don't suffer in silence

HS is a long-term inflammatory skin disorder that results in painful wounds around the sweat glands, often in intimate areas. Many people do not know they have the condition, and suffer in silence. Now there is a simple two-step question to identify if you have HS, so you can receive the treatment you need.



**D**o you, or anyone you know, suffer from painful leaking lumps and bumps that come and go? If so, they could be caused by hidradenitis suppurativa (HS).

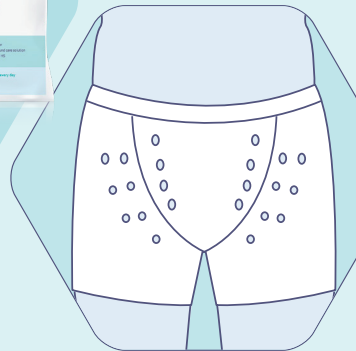
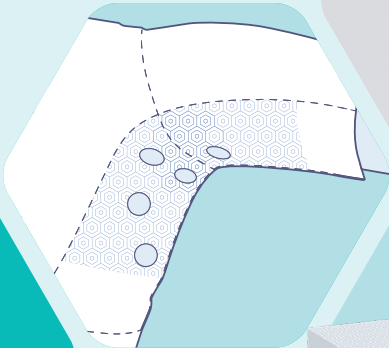
## What is HS?

HS is a long-term inflammatory skin disorder that causes painful oozing nodules and abscesses near the apocrine glands, a type of sweat gland



# HidraWear

## Wearable Wound Care



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that secretes a fatty fluid into the hair follicles. The abscesses can appear in the armpits (axilla), groin, buttocks and breasts. HS is not infectious and isn't linked to poor hygiene, but it can cause pain, discomfort and embarrassment for sufferers, because of the intimate areas it often arises in.

It can take a long time for HS to be diagnosed properly, sometimes with patients waiting for as long as seven years. The reason for this is thought to be a lack of awareness of the condition.

between obesity and smoking and the development of HS, and both can make the symptoms worse.

### Why does diagnosis take so long?

### What causes HS?

The exact cause of HS is unknown, but the lumps develop as a result of blocked hair follicles.

It can occur in anyone but is more common in adolescents, adult women of working age and in people of African and Afro Caribbean origin. It is thought to affect one in one hundred people<sup>1</sup>, and runs in families in approximately one in every three cases.

As HS usually occurs after puberty, it is thought sex hormones play a part in its development. There is also a strong link

It can take a long time for HS to be diagnosed properly, sometimes with patients waiting for as long as seven years. The reason for this is thought to be a lack of awareness of the condition. To improve this situation, a two question algorithm has been developed to make diagnosing HS quick and easy (*Table 1*).

### Treatment

HS is a debilitating disease because of the impact that symptoms such as pain, discomfort, leaking discharge and itching have on everyday life.

The main treatment for HS is wound care and changes in life style. There are however, some other treatments that may be considered depending on the severity of the condition. Medical therapies, for example, cleansing solutions and medication (e.g. antibiotics, retinoids [vitamin A based medicines], contraceptives and immunosuppressive treatments), can be useful in severe cases.

Surgical therapies, such as incision and drainage and skin grafting, have

**Table 1. HS diagnosis**

Have you had an outbreak of boils in the past six months?
<b>If YES,</b> How many and in what location?
≥2 or more in the axilla, breast, backside, groin genitals = <b>HS</b>



been used, but it is reported that these procedures aren't always successful with the HS lesions returning.

Laser treatment can have a positive impact on symptoms. It can be used to excise the lesions or to destroy the hair follicles, which is where HS develops.

## Wound care

Wound care is a crucial part of HS management. Often the leaking lumps and bumps associated with HS can be difficult to manage because of their location.

Historically there has been no specific dressing available for people with HS to wear, presenting a number of challenges. Frequent dressing changes may be needed as they are not absorbent enough, while dressings that are sufficiently absorbent may be bulky and uncomfortable to wear. Mobility can be restricted so that dressings don't fall off, since adhesives can't be used on fragile skin.

Recently, wearable wound care systems (HidraWear, Daylong Direct) have been developed specifically for use with HS patients and to overcome these issues. They have been designed to manage complex wounds in the axilla, groin and buttocks and have been developed and tested by individuals with HS.

Although hidradenitis suppurativa can persist for many years, if it's diagnosed early the symptoms can be improved with treatment.

## Lifestyle advice

If you suffer from HS, there are a number of things you can do to help reduce inflammation<sup>2</sup>. If you are overweight, losing weight can help reduce the inflammation and reduce the friction in skin folds. Diets lower in saturated fats (e.g. Mediterranean type diets) have led to an improvement in HS symptoms. There is a strong link between smoking (specifically nicotine) and HS, so stopping smoking will be a positive step to help control the condition.

Other steps that can be taken are using an antiseptic skin wash or antiseptic soap, holding a warm flannel on the lumps to encourage the pus to drain and avoid shaving affected skin. Using deodorant and talcum powder has not been shown to affect HS.

Wearing tight clothing has been reported to increase the number of inflammatory lesions and so wearing loose-fitting clothes is advisable.

## Seek advice

Although hidradenitis suppurativa can persist for many years, if it's diagnosed early the symptoms can be improved with treatment. If you answered yes to the diagnosis question in *Table 1*, then visit your healthcare professional for advice, taking this article with you. ➤