

Hidradenitis Suppurativa (HS) Patient Information Handout

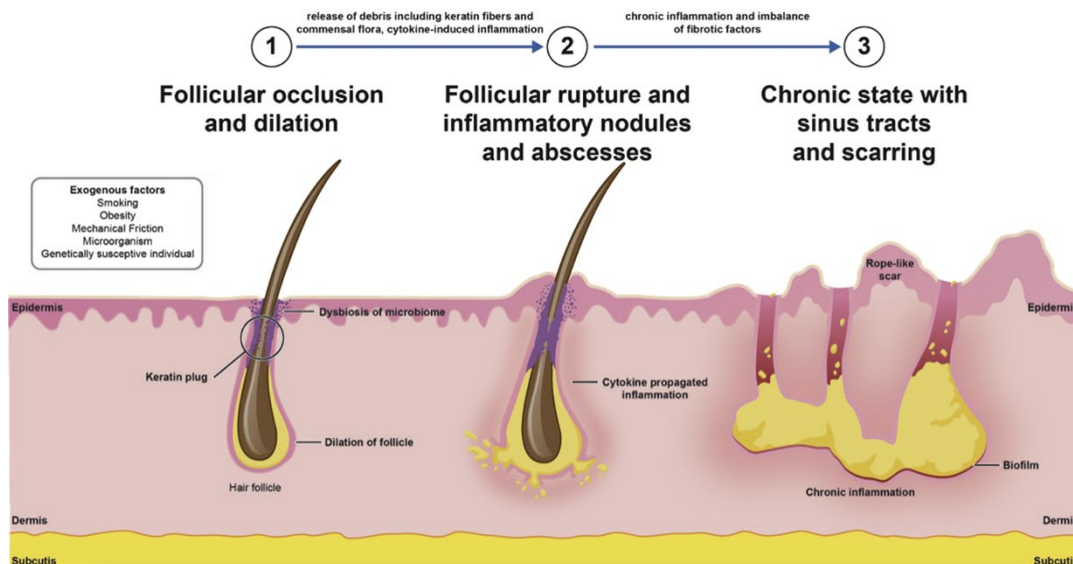


What is hidradenitis suppurativa (HS)?

Hidradenitis suppurativa (HS) is a chronic, painful skin condition which is thought to be related to a genetic weakness in the ductal wall of hair follicles. It often presents with blackheads, pimples, boils, abscesses and scars in the armpits, underneath the breasts, groin and/or buttock. Occasionally, HS lesions can appear on the abdomen or the back of the neck.

There are 4 main processes involved in the formation of HS lesions:

- 1) Abnormal structure of skin cells that line the hair follicles causes oil and dead skin cells to build up in the hair follicle. The hair follicle is weaker than normal and more prone to rupturing.
- 2) Hormonal influence (increased oil production increases clogging of the hair follicles)
- 3) Build-up of oil and dead skin cells causes the hair follicle to rupture, leading to inflammation of the surrounding skin. This causes boils that are typically seen in HS patients.
- 4) Over time, inflammation can cause tunneling of skin that extends past the initial boil. This can lead to scarring and development of sinus tracts.



Goldburg SR, Strober BE, Payette MJ. Hidradenitis suppurativa: Epidemiology, clinical presentation, and pathogenesis. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2020;82(5):1045-1058. doi:10.1016/j.jaad.2019.08.090

What are the Potential Triggers for an HS Flare-Up?

- Smoking
- Hormones (Females can get flares before/during their menstrual periods)
- Skin friction
- Sweating
- Shaving or waxing hair in affected areas
- Diet (high consumption of refined sugars/carbohydrates, skim milk products, protein shakes that contain whey or casein protein)
- Obesity

How is HS Treated?

- Treatment of HS is multi-factorial. You may need multiple different types of treatments to see improvement in your HS.
- **General Measures:**
 - Wearing loose-fitting cotton clothing or moisture-wicking, absorbent fabrics (we recommend Knix™ clothing).
 - Avoid picking/squeezing/rubbing the lesions, as this can cause them to become bigger.
 - Use an antibacterial cleaner (Triclosan topical wash is available over-the-counter at many pharmacies)
 - Consider weight loss strategies if you are overweight or obese, as this can reduce skin-to—skin friction in the areas where you have HS.
 - Consider quitting smoking, as smoking can make HS worse.
 - Adopt a low glycemic index (low sugar/refined carbohydrate diet), avoid skim milk products (other dairy products are ok) and avoid protein shakes that contain whey or casein protein.
- **Medical Treatments:**
 - **Topical antibiotics:** clindamycin topical solution (Dalacin-T) is a topical antibiotic that can be applied to affected areas to reduce inflammation and prevent infection of open wounds.
 - **Topical resorcinol (15% cream):** this is a topical cream that is compounded at Drug and Bean Pharmacy in Killarney (1st Floor of Beacon Dermatology). This cream helps to reduce plugging of hair follicles and can help treat active HS lesions. We recommend using this daily for 12 weeks to help resolve current lesions (as tolerated, as this medication can cause skin peeling) and when you have an HS flare-up of a current or new lesion.
 - **Zinc supplement:** we recommend taking a 100 mg oral zinc supplement once a day for 3-4 months. This has been shown to reduce inflammatory lesions in HS patients. Zinc competes with copper for absorption in the gut and copper deficiency may lead to anemia. Therefore, we will also recommend that you take a 4 mg copper supplement every day, at a different time of day than when you take the zinc supplement.
 - **Hormonal therapies:** these treatments reduce plugging of the hair follicles by reducing the activity of androgen hormones at the hair follicle.
 - For female patients, we may recommend **Yasmin, Yaz, or Diane-35 oral contraceptive pills** as these have anti-androgen activity. These pills are not recommended if you experience migraine headaches with aura, if you smoke tobacco products and are over the age of 35, or if you have ever had a blood clot in the leg (deep vein thrombosis/DVT) or in the lungs (pulmonary embolism/PE).
 - Alternatively, **spironolactone** is another anti-androgenic oral medication that can be used to treat HS. If you have low blood pressure, this may not be the best treatment for you as spironolactone may slightly lower your blood pressure.
 - **Oral Antibiotics:** HS is not an infectious or a contagious condition, but certain antibiotics have anti-inflammatory effects and can be used to treat HS. Minocycline and doxycycline are common antibiotics that we prescribe and these are typically taken daily for 3 months. Many health insurance prescription drug plans mandate that you must fail treatment with oral antibiotics before qualifying for insurance coverage of biologic therapies to treat your HS.

- **Biologics:** Humira (adalimumab) and its biosimilars are the only biologic medications that have been approved by the FDA to treat HS. This treatment is an anti-inflammatory medication that blocks production of an inflammatory protein (TNF- α), which contributes to the inflammation in HS lesions. Biologic medications are reserved for patients with moderate to severe HS who have not seen improvement of their HS with other treatments. Additionally, we often conduct clinical trials of other biologic medications for HS at Beacon Dermatology, so please ask us about our ongoing clinical trials if you are interested in participating.
- **Laser Hair Removal:** we offer a 50% discount on laser hair removal for all HS patients at Beacon Dermatology. Laser hair removal selectively targets and destroys hair follicles, which can help prevent new HS lesions from forming in hair-bearing areas of the underarms and pubic area.
- **Intralesional Kenalog injections:** we can inject steroids directly into HS lesions, which helps reduce pain and inflammation from flare-ups and can help these lesions to resolve more quickly. We allow our HS patients to book an urgent, fit-in appointment for these injections and we will try to fit you in to our clinic schedule within 1-2 clinic days. If needed, you can call the Beacon Dermatology reception team at [587-392-7546](tel:587-392-7546) and tell them that you are a HS patient and would like to have Kenalog injections done.
- **Botulinum toxin (Botox) injections:** Botox is used to treat excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis) and some studies have found that this can help to reduce the number of HS lesions in treated areas. We can inject Botox into the armpits, underneath the breasts, and in the groin/buttocks. Some drug insurance plans may cover the cost of this treatment.
- **De-roofing surgery:** this is an option for managing lesions which recur in the same spot or sinus tracts underneath the skin. Deroofing surgery can improve your quality of life by eliminating pain and drainage from problem spots and these lesions often do not come back in the same spot! Ask your dermatologist if you would be a good candidate for de-roofing surgery!

Take-Home Messages:

- 1) HS is not an infectious or contagious disease! HS is also not caused by poor hygiene!
- 2) There is hope! There is a lot of research on new treatments for HS and Beacon Dermatology is a centre of excellence. We are here to support you!

Resources:

- 1) **Knix™ Clothing:**
https://knix.ca/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=sem&utm_campaign=CA_Knix_CoreBrand_BRN&gclid=Cj0KCQjwsrWZBhC4ARIsAGGUJury7mgcOwbJRNaxGaxHY_MCM4uv7Iu0F2N7Y_OjRGB5YZfPwsUfiUircaAms-EALw_wcB
- 2) **Support for dietary changes and/or quitting smoking:** we have partnered with Co-Op pharmacies to offer patient support programs with registered pharmacists in Calgary. Ask your medical team at Beacon Dermatology for a referral to this program if you are interested in receiving this service!
- 3) **HS eBook:** An in-depth resource for HS patients that was written by doctors who are a part of the national Canadian Hidradenitis Suppurativa Foundation. Ask us for a handout that contains the link to this resource.