

HIDRADENITIS SUPPURATIVA

Hidradenitis suppurativa is a fancy medical term for a skin condition which tends to affect certain body areas. The word hidradenitis refers to the swelling that can occur in glands called apocrine glands which are located in the skin fold areas. The term suppurativa refers to the fact that the glands can sometimes become inflamed and drain on their own.

Hidradenitis suppurativa is a chronic condition that affects certain body areas where there is a high concentration of apocrine glands. These include the armpits, groin region, buttocks, and skin under the breasts in women. Women are affected more often than men and the condition often starts around puberty. There is a genetic tendency towards this condition so in some cases, other family members may have a similar problem.

The skin lesions in hidradenitis suppurativa are thought to develop from the blocking of an apocrine sweat gland which leads to enlargement of the duct and hair follicle. At times this may appear as a blackhead or whitehead. In many cases the blocked duct causes redness and swelling underneath the skin. This can produce a lesion that appears to be a boil or abscess. Eventually, the gland may rupture and leak its contents into the skin, causing further inflammation. Over time the affected areas may become scarred and form tracts under the skin which continue to drain material.

Many patients have only mild involvement in one area of the body. Some patients have involvement of all the affected areas to varying degrees. In many cases, the condition can improve on its own, especially in the 30's or 40's.

There are many different treatments for hidradenitis suppurativa. Some of the medications used are for preventative measures. This usually involves various soaps and lotions applied to the skin. Treatment of individual boil type growths includes the injection of material to shrink the swelling and minor office procedures where the contents are drained through an incision. In many cases, oral antibiotics are helpful to decrease the swelling of the inflamed glands. When the involvement is more extensive, total removal of the affected apocrine glands is the best treatment. If all the glands are removed, this is the closest type treatment to a cure. If you are a candidate for this type of procedure, I will let you know.

Hidradenitis suppurativa can be a frustrating condition because it tends to come and go over time. As I noted above, there are treatments which can help. I will try to determine individually what would be the best treatment in your case. If you have any other questions regarding this condition, please do not hesitate to ask before you leave the office.