


Your guide to

# Hidradenitis Suppurativa



# An overview of hidradenitis suppurativa

While there is no cure, hidradenitis  
suppurativa (HS) can be managed in  
many ways.



## What is hidradenitis suppurativa?

“hi-drah-den-i-tus super-uh-tee-vah”

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Hidradenitis suppurativa (HS) is a chronic (long-lasting) systemic skin condition involving painful bumps or boils that can come and go. It is a condition associated with inflammation throughout the body that often affects the hair follicles and sweat glands. HS mainly occurs in areas of the body where skin meets skin, like the armpits, the groin area, inner thighs, buttocks, and under the breasts. Bumps caused by HS can lead to boil-like abscesses that can leak and leave scars.

### ..and what HS is not.

HS is not a rash, is not contagious, and is not caused by poor hygiene. While HS is not curable, it can be managed with proper treatment.

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**You are not alone.**

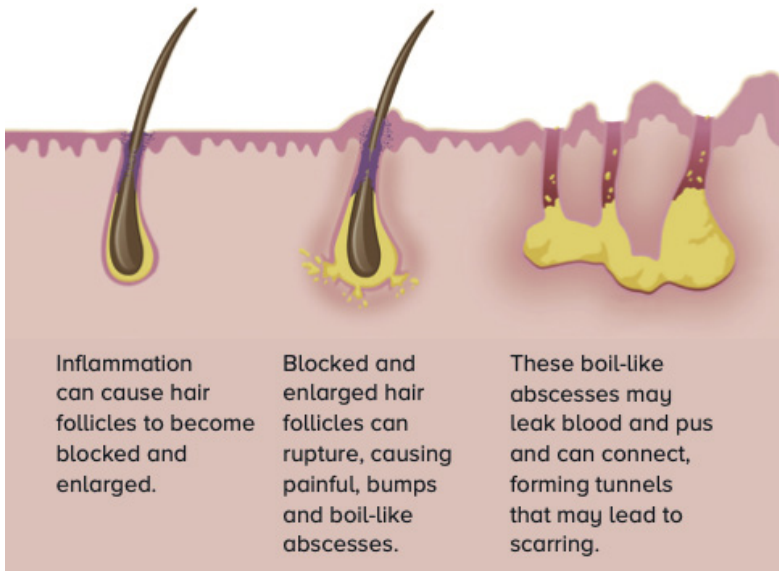


**in 100**

**One in 100 people may be affected by hidradenitis suppurativa (HS).**

## What causes hidradenitis suppurativa?

While the exact cause of HS is unproven, it is thought that too much inflammation builds up where skin rubs together, causing bumps and boil-like abscesses that may burst and leave scars.



In HS, it is thought that an overactive immune system attacks blocked hair follicles.

## It's not your fault.

HS may run in the family. The condition is mostly seen in women, and disproportionately affects people of colour. Other factors thought to contribute to HS include one's weight and smoking.

HS almost exclusively occurs after puberty, usually beginning in a person's 20s, but in rare cases can start as early as puberty or as late as their 50s.

- Women are **3x more likely** to develop HS.
- **30%-40%** of people with HS have a family member with the condition.
- **Hormonal changes** can contribute to the development of HS symptoms and may make them worse.

HS is more common in women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a condition that causes hormonal imbalances. Some women may also experience HS flares around the time of their menstrual period.



## What are the signs and symptoms of hidradenitis suppurativa?

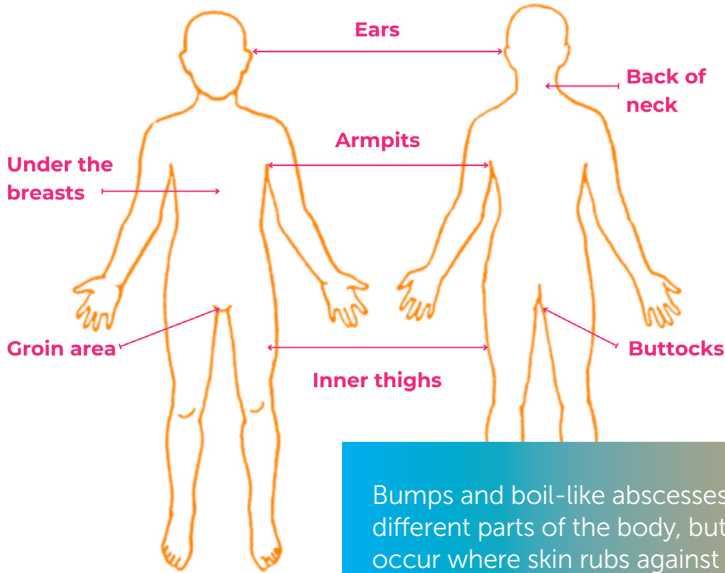
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Recurring bumps and boils that hurt could be HS. The bumps and boil-like abscesses of HS often come back more than once in the same area, or areas, for weeks or months. HS outbreaks can flare and rupture, leaking blood and pus that may have an odour. Over time, they may connect under the skin, forming deep and painful tunnels that can scar. HS may be classified into various stages, from mild to severe.





## Where you might find HS



Bumps and boil-like abscesses can appear on different parts of the body, but most frequently occur where skin rubs against skin or clothing.

## People with HS may also have one or more health issues at the same time, such as:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- Squamous cell carcinoma

If you think you may be experiencing any of these conditions, it's important you talk with your doctor.

## What treatments can help?

Various treatment options are available to help manage HS and are adapted to meet the needs of each individual. The following list of treatment options may not be comprehensive or appropriate for everyone.



### Antibiotics

Mild symptoms may be managed with oral or topical antibiotics.



### Biologics

Biologics are medications produced from living organisms or that contain components of living organisms and are used to treat many types of systemic inflammatory conditions. They are taken by injection or infusion.



### Creams and ointments

Topical corticosteroids in the form of creams and ointments may also be used to treat HS.



### NSAIDS

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs may temporarily relieve HS symptoms, including pain.



### Surgery

Surgery is another way to manage HS when a tunnel and boil-like abscesses are present. Different surgical approaches are available depending on the extent and severity of your condition. After surgery, boil-like abscesses might recur or appear in other areas.



## What can you do about HS symptoms?



People with HS are advised to wear loose-fitting clothing to help reduce sweat squeeze and keep moisture from causing further irritation and pain to HS bumps and open wounds.



Quitting smoking and managing one's weight may help with the symptoms of HS.



Avoid using washcloths, loofahs, or abrasive material, as they may irritate the skin. Do not rub bumps and boil-like abscesses. Avoid shaving or using hair-removal creams.



Discuss laser hair removal with your doctor. Studies have shown that laser hair removal can help reduce HS flare-ups, as it reduces the number of hair follicles you have and can decrease bacteria on your skin.



Keeping a journal to track your HS symptoms can help you understand how the condition impacts your life, and may help when you speak with your dermatologist. See the symptom tracker starting on page 13.

You have a crucial role to play in managing your condition. It's important to learn more about HS, listen to your body, and don't be afraid to seek advice. Be aware of your symptoms to improve conversations with your doctor and to ensure that together, you choose the treatment that is right for you.

## Help is available

Living with a long-term health condition like HS can affect you in many ways, both physically and emotionally. Knowing you're not alone can make the road ahead easier. Remember, you can always reach out to your healthcare provider to seek advice about HS or other conditions that may be related to HS.



## HS Glossary

Below, you'll find some HS terms that may help guide the conversation with your dermatologist:

### **Abscess**

a swollen area within body tissue, characterized by a painful, swollen lump that's filled with pus.

### **Bump**

a swelling of the skin. Some bumps get bigger, break open, and drain pus with an odor.

### **Boil**

an inflamed, pus-filled swelling on the skin, typically caused by the infection of a hair follicle.

### **Flare**

a sudden outburst or worsening condition.

### **Immune system**

a complex network of cells and proteins that defends the body against infection.

### **Ingrown hair**

an ingrown hair occurs when a shaved or tweezed hair grows back into the skin.

### **Scarring**

a mark left on the skin after a surface injury or wound has healed.

### **Systemic**

something that affects multiple organs or parts of the body, possibly affecting the entire body.

### **Tunnels (also called sinus tracts)**

when the walls of an inflamed hair follicle rupture, leaking pus beneath the skin. This leads to narrow openings or passageways that extend from the wound underneath the skin, forming connections between abscesses.





# Symptom tracker

## **Hidradenitis Suppurativa** Keep track of your symptoms and monitor your progress

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This tracker allows you to monitor your symptoms and progress over the next nine months. Tracking how your symptoms change over time – and their impact on your moods, social life, and ability to work – can help you and your healthcare team check that you're getting the most out of treatment.

# ▶ START OF TREATMENT

Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

## Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms and what they are

(e.g. painful lumps, boils, blackheads, cysts, leaking bumps or sores, tunnels or abscesses)

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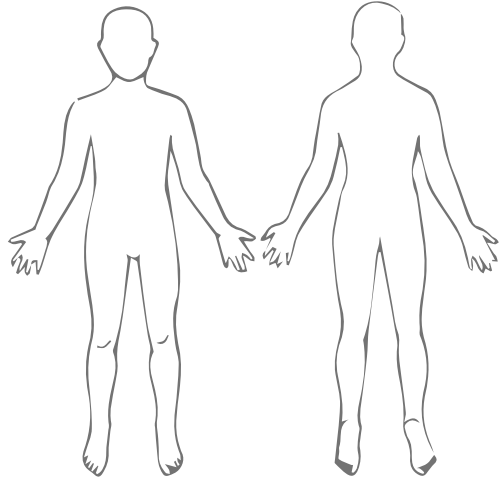
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Front

Back

## Notes & questions

Write down any notes, questions or concerns to discuss with your doctor

(e.g. pain, difficulty moving, scars or skin changes, swelling, flare-ups)

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## Rate your current symptoms

Circle the face that best reflects your current symptoms.

	VERY SEVERE				NONE
<b>Fatigue/tiredness</b> My overall fatigue/tiredness today is:					
<b>Painful lumps/swelling/tenderness</b> My swelling/tenderness symptoms today are:					
<b>Overall pain</b> My overall pain today is:					
<b>Difficulty moving</b> My difficulty moving today is:					

	VERY POOR				VERY GOOD
<b>Mood</b> My mood today is:					
<b>Sleep quality</b> My sleep quality last night was:					
<b>Social activity/relationships</b> My ability to engage in social activities and relationships with friends and family is:					
<b>Work life/daily activities</b> My ability to work or carry out my daily activities today is:					



# ▶ AFTER 3 MONTHS

Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

## Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms and what they are

(e.g. painful lumps, boils, blackheads, cysts, leaking bumps or sores, tunnels or abscesses)

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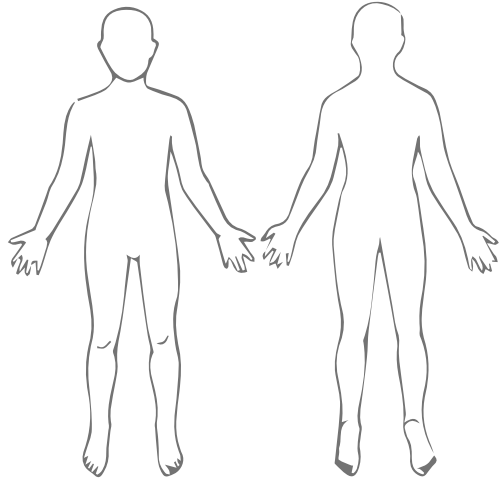
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Front

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For example – what helped with your symptoms, or made things worse? What improvements have you noticed? Are there activities you can now do that you couldn't before?

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# ▶ AFTER 6 MONTHS

Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

## Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms and what they are

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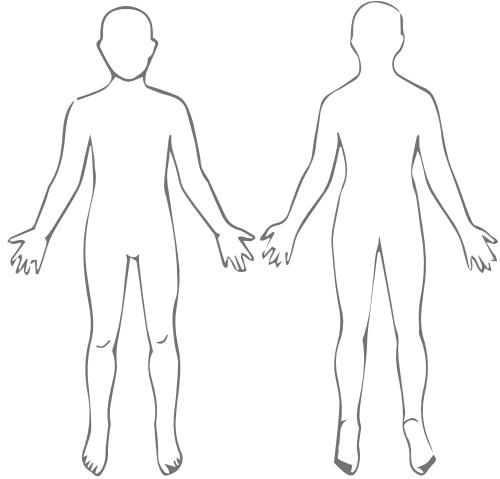
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# ▶ AFTER 9 MONTHS

Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

## Mark on the diagram where you have symptoms and what they are

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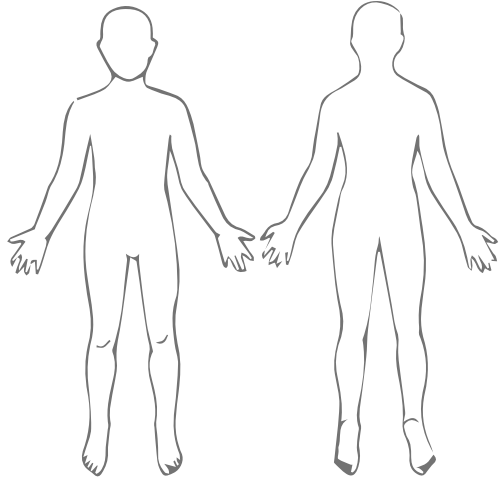
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# Notes

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