

Department of Oral and Maxillo Facial Surgery

Lichen Planus

This leaflet contains information for patients with lichen planus of the mouth. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask. You can contact us on 024 7696 6500.

What is lichen planus?

Lichen planus is an inflammatory condition that can affect the lining of the mouth as well as the skin. The cause is not fully understood. It affects about 1 in 50 of the population. Lichen planus is more common in the middle aged and women are affected slightly more often than men. Although there is no known cure, treatment can be given to improve the symptoms. It is important to remember that:

- It is not cancer.
- It is not inherited (passed on from your parents).
- It is not contagious - you cannot “catch it” from someone who has it, or give it to somebody else.
- It is not related to nutrition, although some foods you eat can make the patches of lichen planus sore.

What does it look like?

In the mouth lichen planus is usually found on the inside of the cheeks and on the side of the tongue but it can also affect the gums and roof of the mouth.

Usually lichen planus has a lace-like pattern of streaky white patches that occasionally can be thickened.

The patches often affect the same site on different sides of the mouth. Lichen planus may be associated with red patches and/or ulceration.



How is lichen planus diagnosed?

The appearance of lichen planus is distinctive and can be diagnosed by an experienced clinician just by looking inside your mouth. The diagnosis sometimes needs confirmation with a biopsy (removal of a small amount of tissue which can then be looked at closely under a microscope).

How is lichen planus treated?

If lichen planus is not causing you any problems no treatment is required although you may be kept under review. If lichen planus is causing you problems such as soreness, treatment can be given to ease the symptoms. These are usually applied directly to the affected areas (topically) as mouth rinses or pastes.

Is there anything else I can do?

- You may find it helpful to keep a diary and look for trigger events if you have a flare-up of symptoms. These flare-ups may be related to particular foods, stress or local trauma which, if identified, can be avoided.
- A milder form of toothpaste may help. It is important to maintain good hygiene in the mouth.
- Some lichen planus can be related to amalgam (metal fillings). If this is the case it may be suggested that a filling is replaced, if near to the lichen planus.

Will I always have lichen planus?

This is difficult to say. Some people suffer for only a few months before their symptoms settle down. Others may suffer for several years. Once the symptoms disappear they may or may not return at a later date.

Adapted from information supplied by:
British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons

<http://www.baoms.org.uk/>

Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact us on 024 7696 6500 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

Document History	
Department:	Maxillo facial
Contact:	26500
Updated:	October 2020
Review:	October 2022
Version:	5.2
Reference:	HIC/LFT/856/09