

## Gynaecology

# Vulval Lichen Planus

**Lichen Planus is a condition that mainly affects the skin causing an itchy rash. It can affect the mouth, genitals, hair, nails and rarely other parts of the body.**

**This leaflet contains information for patients with Lichen Planus of the vulval area.**

### What is Lichen Planus?

- Lichen Planus affects around 1-2% of the population
- Lichen Planus is a recurrent rash due to inflammation
- The rash is itchy and non-infectious
- Lichen planus can affect many areas of the body such as the arms, legs, back, scalp and nails. It can also affect the lining (mucous membrane) of the mouth. Other affected areas in women include the vulva and the vaginal introitus (entrance)

### What are the symptoms of Vulval Lichen Planus?

- Chronic itching and soreness of the vulval area
- Skin becomes more fragile than normal. You may experience splitting of the vulval area causing stinging and pain
- Inflammation and sometimes swelling
- Susceptibility to infection
- The vulva may become distorted, causing change in shape/size. The vagina may become narrowed
- You may experience pain and difficulties with sexual intercourse
- Pain and difficulty with passing urine

You may not experience all of these symptoms, some women may only experience itching, or have no symptoms at all.

Lichen planus can carry a very small risk of developing local types of skin cancer; the risk is about 2%.

### Who can get Lichen Planus?

Lichen planus of the skin can affect both men and women. However, oral lichen planus is more common among females.



## Patient Information

In around 50% of all cases of lichen planus the mouth is affected. The condition is more common in adults over 40 years of age. Lichen planus is not infectious, does not usually run in families and cannot be passed on to others.

### **What are the causes of Lichen Planus?**

The cause of lichen planus is unknown. However, it is thought that the causes of the condition may be related to:

- The immune system (the body's natural defence against infection) for example thyroid problems
- A reaction to certain types of medication such as Anti-malarial tablets

### **How can lichen Planus be diagnosed and treated?**

Diagnosis can be a long process. Referral to a specialist is usually necessary. Often experienced specialists can say by examination and the characteristics of the vulval skin, that this is what they think the condition is, but to get an accurate diagnosis a vulval biopsy may be necessary.

The specialist may well start you on a course of steroid ointments/cream with instructions on how and when to apply it. This should reduce the inflammation and itching. You may then be reviewed in the clinic again in three to four months to see if this course of treatment has worked. This treatment is safe, can often control the symptoms very well, and can help women go back to a normal life.

There is no permanent cure for lichen planus, so treatments aim to ease the symptoms. Mild cases of lichen planus will not require treatment. Different mouth washes are also available to help with oral symptoms.

### **What can I do to help this condition?**

- Avoid washing with soaps/bubble bath
- Do not let affected areas of skin come into contact with shampoo (wash hair over basin)
- Use an emollient to moisturise the area
- Wear cotton underwear
- Wear stockings instead of tights
- Wear loose fitting clothes (try to avoid trousers/jeans)
- Use the prescribed cream/ointment to the affected area as instructed

Many women feel frightened when they are first told that they have lichen planus and worry that it may develop into cancer. You may find the treatments and appointments embarrassing and frightening, and you may feel tense, tearful or withdrawn. If we can help in any way please ask us and we will do all we can to help you feel more comfortable.

### **Further Information**

If you need to discuss this condition further please phone Sister Amanda Clarson (Clinical Nurse Specialist) on 024 7696 7222. If there is no answer, please leave a

## Patient Information

short message and your telephone number on the answering machine and Lynn will return your call as soon as she is available.

### **National sources of further information:**

[www.uklp.org.uk](http://www.uklp.org.uk)

UK Lichen Planus  
c/o 14 Newbury Avenue  
Calne  
Wiltshire SN11 9UN

Telephone: 0751 443 2552

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact Lynn Connor or Amanda Clarson on 024 7696 7222 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

### **Document History**

Author	Lynn Connor / Amanda Clarson (Clinical Nurse Specialist)
Department	Gynaecology
Contact Tel	024 7696 7222
Published	April 2012
Reviewed	April 2019
Review	April 2021
Version	3.1
Reference	HIC/LFT/1426/12