

Lichen planus

Information for patients

This leaflet aims to help you understand any future treatment you may have for lichen planus, and answer many commonly asked questions. If you have any queries after reading this leaflet, please ask a member of staff.

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, but it affects up to two in every 100 members of the population.

Lichen planus is most common in middle age, and women are affected slightly more often than men. Although there is no known cure, treatment can be given to make the symptoms better.

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, although 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. Often patches are symmetrical (they affect the same site on different sides of the mouth) or may be linked with red patches or soreness.



What lichen planus is not

- It is not a 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 linked to nutrition or diet, although some foods you eat can make the patches of lichen planus sore.



How is lichen planus diagnosed?

The appearance is usually typical and can be diagnosed by an experienced doctor just by looking inside your mouth. The diagnosis sometimes needs to be confirmed with a biopsy (removal of a small amount of tissue, which will be looked at closely under a microscope). The biopsy is carried out in the Maxillofacial Department under local anaesthetic (the area is numbed but you are awake) as a minor oral surgery procedure. Your doctor will discuss this with you at your outpatient appointment.

How is lichen planus treated?

If lichen planus is not causing you any problems it does not need treatment, although you may be kept a close eye on. If lichen planus is causing you problems, such as soreness, then treatments can be given to make the symptoms better. Usually these treatments are mouth rinses or tablets.

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 when you eat particular foods or are stressed.
- You may find it useful to change to a milder form of toothpaste, but remember you must continue to brush your teeth as good oral hygiene is very important.
- Some lichen planus can be linked to amalgam (metal fillings). If this is the case for you, it may be suggested that a filling is replaced.

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.

Further information

If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your GP.

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation