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Oral Lichen Planus: Patient information Sheet

What is it?

Lichen planus is a disease that can cause ulceration in the mouth. It can also affect skin, nails, and genital and scalp areas. It can affect around 2% of the population but more women are affected especially in the 40-60 year age groups.

What Causes Lichen Planus:

The cause of lichen planus is not completely known but it is believed to be an autoimmune disorder by many (body reacting to itself) and may involve genetics and the immune system. It is not an infection or cancer although some cases are reported of cancer formation. For this reason it is important to have your mouth reviewed by an Oral Medicine Specialist.

Appearance in the Mouth

The name lichen comes from a plant that is often seen growing on rocks with its mossy, web-like appearance.

Lichen planus can have many clinical appearances, from ulceration, plaque like white patches to white lace like pattern and just red areas. They may cause pain or may be asymptomatic. Generally Lichen Planus is managed not cured and sometimes topical creams are used for those lesions that cause symptoms or area which appear red in colour. Some people complain of pain or exacerbation with spicy foods, acid (tomato) foods or certain toothpastes. These things don't actually cause the disease but create symptoms.

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It is important to realise that this is a chronic ongoing problem which may “frizzle out” with time. It is not cancer but some lesions may turn that way so regular reviews are important. It is not an infection and you cannot catch or give it to someone else.





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Summary:

- 1. Lichen Planus should be properly diagnosed by a clinician, usually by a biopsy (a sample from the mouth)**
- 2. It is not an infection**
- 3. Small percentages are said to cause cancer, however Lichen planus is not cancer**
- 4. We can't cure it but manage the lesions especially if they are red or symptomatic**
- 5. Cleaning your mouth, eating drinking will not cause Lichen planus**
- 6. Regular review by a specialist is important**