

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Hospital switchboard on

Tel: 01752 202082

And ask to be put through to the Oral and Maxillofacial Department.

Maxillofacial Department is open Mon-Fri 9:00 to 5:00



This leaflet is available in large print and other formats and languages.

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Lichen Planus v3

Maxillofacial Department

Information on Oral Lichen Planus

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What is Oral Lichen Planus?

Lichen Planus is an inflammatory condition of the skin, but it can also affect the mouth and genital region. Oral Lichen Planus can occur on its own or in combination with Lichen Planus of the skin and genitals. It is thought to affect 1 to 2% of the population. Oral Lichen planus predominantly occurs in adults older than 40 years, although younger adults and children can be affected.

What are the symptoms of Oral Lichen Planus ?

The symptoms of Oral Lichen Planus may include burning or stinging in the mouth when eating or drinking. Mild cases may be symptom free. Spicy food, citrus fruits and alcohol can be particularly troublesome. If your gums are affected, they may become tender and tooth brushing can be uncomfortable. Ulcers may occur and these are especially painful.

What does Lichen Planus look like?

Typically, Oral Lichen Planus presents as a white, lace like pattern on the tongue and inner surfaces of the cheeks. However, it can appear as white and red patches or as areas of ulceration on the lining of the mouth. Involvement of the gums with Oral Lichen Planus is known as desquamative Gingivitis, this causes your gums to become red and shiny.

How is Lichen Planus diagnosed?

Your dentist or doctor may be able to make a diagnosis based solely on the appearance of your mouth. However, it is often necessary to take a small sample (biopsy from the affected area inside the mouth for microscopic examination. A local anaesthetic injection to numb the area will be needed for this procedure).

Can Oral lichen Planus be cured?

In most cases Oral Lichen Planus cannot be cured, but may go away spontaneously. It tends to remain longer than Lichen Planus of the skin and may persist for a number of years. However, there are treatments to dampen down the symptoms.

Is Oral Lichen Planus serious?

In most patients Oral Lichen Planus is not serious. However, an important, although uncommon, feature of Oral Lichen Planus is a predisposition to cancerous change (about 0.5-2% risk over a period of 5 years in long standing Lichen Planus).

How can Oral Lichen Planus be treated?

Mild cases may be symptom free and treatment is not required. Your dentist or doctor will discuss different treatment options with you.

What can I do to relieve the symptoms of Oral Lichen Planus?

Avoid spicy acidic or salty foods if these make your mouth sore.

The importance of maintaining a high standard of oral hygiene has already been emphasised, and you may wish to enlist the help of a dental hygienist. Some toothpaste may aggravate your Oral Lichen Planus and it may be helpful to use a mild toothpaste with minimal flavourings and other ingredients.

In view of the small risk of cancerous change, it is important that you ensure that your mouth is checked on a regular basis (every 6 -12 months) by a dentist or oral specialist, so that early changes can be recognised.

Smoking and excessive amounts of alcohol are the main risk factors for mouth cancer. It is advisable to stop smoking and reduce alcohol intake to recommended limits.