



**Peninsula  
Dental**  
Social Enterprise

# **Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE)**

## **Lichen Planus Management Patient Information**

### **Version 3.0**

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Policy will be updated as required in response to a change in national policy or evidence-based guideline.

## **Lichen Planus**

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of any forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the commonly asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask.

### **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 is common and affects up to 2% of the population. Lichen planus is most frequent in middle age and women are affected slightly more frequently 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 the patches are symmetrical, i.e., affect the same site on different sides of the mouth.

The symptoms of oral lichen planus may include a burning or stinging discomfort in the mouth when eating or drinking. Mild cases may be symptom free. Spicy foods, citrus fruits and alcohol can be particularly troublesome. If your gums are affected, they may become tender, and tooth-brushing can be uncomfortable. Ulcers (often called erosions) may occur, and these are especially painful.

### **What lichen planus is not?**

- It is not cancer
- It is not inherited, i.e., passed on from your parents
- It is not contagious, i.e., 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.

### **How is lichen planus diagnosed?**

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

### **Is oral lichen planus serious?**

In most patient's oral lichen planus is not serious. However, an important, although uncommon, feature of oral lichen planus is a predisposition to cancerous change (about a 1% risk over a period of 10 years).

### **How is lichen planus treated?**

In most cases oral lichen planus cannot be cured but may go away spontaneously. If lichen planus is not causing you any problems, it does not require treatment although you may be kept a close eye on. If lichen planus is causing you problems such as soreness, treatments can be given to lessen the symptoms. Usually these are given directly on to the affected areas (topically) rather than having to take tablets to swallow.

### **Is there anything else I can do?**

- Avoid spicy, acidic, or salty foods if these make your mouth sore.
- Keep your teeth clean by using a soft brush and small interdental brushes
- Choose a toothpaste with a mild flavour and free from the foaming agent, sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS ).
- In view of the small risk of cancerous change in oral lichen planus, it is important that you ensure that your mouth is checked on a regular basis by a dentist or oral specialist, so that any early changes can be spotted.
- It is advisable to stop smoking and reduce your alcohol intake to recommended limits (currently 14 units a week for both men and women) as these are the main risk factors for mouth cancer.

Rarely, lichen planus can occur in reaction to certain medications or metal fillings. This is called a lichenoid reaction. If this is the case, it may be suggested that a filling is replaced, or you may need to consult your GP to review your medications.

### **Where can I get more information about oral lichen planus?**

[www.aad.org/pamphlets/lichen.html](http://www.aad.org/pamphlets/lichen.html)

<http://www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/oral-lichen-planus/DS00784>

<http://www.emedicine.com/derm/TOPIC663.HTM>

<http://www.dermnetnz.org/scaly/oral-lichen-planus.html> [www.uklp.org.uk](http://www.uklp.org.uk) (patient support group)