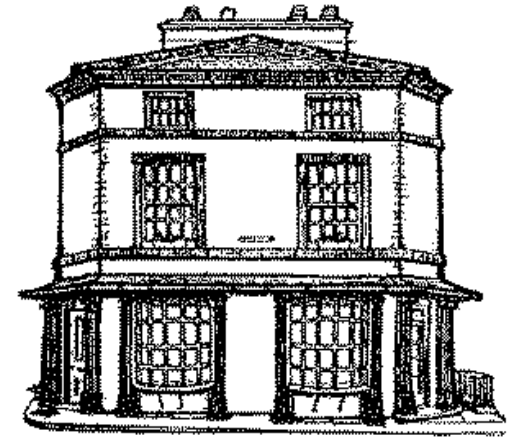


# Lichen Planus



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## **What is it?**

Lichen Planus is a chronic disease that affects the skin and mouth, and sometimes the hair, nails and genitalia. It affects 1-2% of adults in the UK and is more common in the 40+ age group. It is not infectious and does not run in families.

## **What does it look like?**

Lichen Planus typically appears as white net-like lines or white patches, usually on the insides of the cheeks. The lines and patches can also appear on the tongue and gums. They do not usually cause any discomfort and can often go unnoticed, and may only be recognised by a dentist or hygienist during a routine examination.

In some cases red patches, ulcers and blisters can appear, the gums can become thin, red and shiny and become painful to brush. This can also cause burning and soreness.

About a third of patients also get a purple, itchy rash with raised dots on the skin, often on the wrists and shins.

## **What causes it?**

The cause of Lichen Planus is not certain, but it is probably an “autoimmune” disease where overactive immune system cells that normally fight off germs are attacking normal parts of the body.

Some drugs used to treat high blood pressure, arthritis and diabetes can cause lesions very similar to Lichen Planus.

Emotional stress is a common factor, and smoking, spicy foods and citrus fruits can cause symptoms to worsen.

## **How is it treated?**

If the lesions are pain free there is usually no treatment necessary. It is important to keep the mouth clean though, to prevent the lesions becoming infected.

Sometimes a mouthwash containing Chlorhexidine is used to help keep the lesions clean. There are many different treatments available for treating Lichen Planus if it becomes painful.

Topical steroids are often used as they are not absorbed into the body, and only work on the area they are applied to, which reduces side-

effects. Adcortyl in Orabase is a steroid cream that is applied to the lesions with a cotton wool bud just before going to bed. Corlan pellets can be placed on the lesions and sucked slowly during the day, but they are quite bitter. If these are not effective, referral to a consultant may be appropriate.

It may be useful to try and identify factors which make the problem worse for you. In some cases eliminating the known triggers can stop the lesions recurring. Typical factors are stress, smoking, spicy foods especially chillies, citrus fruits, strongly flavoured foods, artificial colourants and flavourings, or a change of toothpaste.

Lichen Planus can last from several weeks to several years but usually slowly disappears over time. Most skin sores heal by themselves over 18 months and are not likely to recur. If the Lichen Planus changes in appearance or becomes painful, please contact the Dental Surgery.