

Lichen Planus

Patient Information Leaflet

What is Lichen Planus?

Lichen Planus is a fairly common, itchy, non-infectious type of rash that usually occurs in adults.

It is a noncancerous, inflammatory skin condition that can occur in the skin on any part of the body. Lichen Planus can result in itchy purplish small bumps affecting the skin. In some cases it can affect the genital area (vulva and/or vagina) and the mouth and then may also cause sore raw areas (ulcers or erosions). Lichen Planus may occasionally affect the scalp, nails or the skin around the back passage (perianal skin).

The slow-developing inflammation of the skin can be controlled by treatment but can't be cured.

What causes Lichen Planus?

Lichen Planus is NOT caused by something you did or didn't do, it is NOT a sexually transmitted disease and it is NOT infectious. The cause is unknown but rarely it can be triggered by medication. Some women with these conditions may have other family members with Lichen Sclerosus or Lichen Planus, so it's thought that these conditions may sometimes be caused by, an inherited faulty gene. Lichen Planus is more common in older women and in women who have autoimmune illnesses such as thyroid problems or pernicious anaemia.

These changes are not cancer, but in a few people they may, over many years, develop into a type of skin cancer known as squamous cell cancer.

What are the symptoms of Lichen Planus?

The skin in the affected areas becomes very itchy and sore, with an abnormal appearance, and a change in colour.

The skin becomes more fragile than normal skin and may split, causing stinging and pain. The vulva may become distorted, causing a change in its shape or size. Occasionally, this leads to difficulties with passing urine or having sex.

The vagina may become narrowed, and sex may become uncomfortable.

The symptoms vary from woman to woman, and some women with these conditions have no symptoms at all. In this case, the conditions may be discovered during medical examinations for other health problems.

The above symptoms can be caused by other conditions.

If you have any of these symptoms, let your GP know. They can then examine you and refer you to a doctor who specialises in women's health (a gynaecologist).

Can there be any complications from Lichen Planus?

The itch and discomfort may cause much distress and the changes to the genital skin may cause sexual difficulties or problems in passing urine. There is also a small increased risk of developing cancer of the vulva. The exact risk is not

known but cancer usually occurs in women in their 60s–90s rather than in younger women.

How will Lichen Planus be diagnosed?

The appearance of Lichen Planus is often fairly typical so can often be diagnosed simply by the appearance of the skin. Sometimes to confirm the diagnosis a small sample (biopsy) of affected skin may be taken under local anaesthetic and examined under the microscope. This can confirm the diagnosis and rule out other disorders, which can sometimes mimic this condition.

What is the treatment for Lichen Planus?

A strong steroid ointment or cream (topical steroid) is the main treatment often used in conjunction with a bland moisturizer.

It is important to maintain treatment for as long as advised. Irritation tends to ease after two weeks or so, but the skin may take about three months of treatment to look and feel better.

Can Lichen Planus be cured?

Lichen Planus can clear up within 18 months. In some women the problem may not recur; others may have further episodes up to many years later. Unfortunately some types of Lichen Planus can last for many years.

There is no permanent cure for Lichen Planus. Treatment with a topical steroid usually controls the symptoms of itch and soreness, and often prevents the condition from getting worse.

Where can I get further information about Lichen Planus?

We recommend that you use dedicated websites or helplines to gain further information on Lichen Planus as generic internet searches can lead to you reading information that is not accurate or out of date.

Vulval Pain Society -

<http://www.vulvalpainsociety.org/>

Vulval Health Awareness Campaign-

www.vhac.org

Email: info@vhac.org

Tel: 07765 947599

British Association of Dermatologists-

www.bad.org.uk

Email: admin@bad.org.uk

Tel: 0207 383 0266