

## LICHEN PLANUS

Lichen Planus (LP) is a disorder affecting the skin, the lining of the mouth, gastro intestinal tract and the reproductive organs. What causes Lichen Planus is not fully understood. What is known though, is that it is non-infectious, unrelated to social economic group and occupation.

This disorder occurs in approximately 1 - 2 % of the population. It occurs in both sexes, 60 - 65% of patients affected are women. It tends to occur in men a decade younger than for women. It is predominantly a disease of the middle ages and elderly (ranges from 30 to 70 years).

Lichen Planus can occur on the skin as well as the mouth. The LP that appears in the mouth can take a number of forms (6 in fact). These forms can range from slightly raised white lines in an interlocking lacy or ring-like pattern (the most common form) to white patches or ulcers. Regardless of the form of LP treatment is the same.

In the mouth, LP occurs symmetrically. If it occurs on one cheek, it will be on the other. If it occurs on the gum on one side it will be on the other (also it is likely to be on the upper arch if the lower is affected and vice versa). Similarly for the tongue. Sometimes LP can occur that is not symmetrical. These tend to occur when the cheek or tongue is in continual apposition to an amalgam (metal) filling. They tend to resolve when either the filling is polished or replaced with a non- amalgam restoration.

The skin sites include the arms, especially the wrists, and legs, notable the shins.

The white patches can last for up to 10 to 15 years with the spontaneous remission occurring. However, in a recent study, it was found that the mean duration was approximately 4 1/2 years.

Certain drugs can cause Lichen Planus-like lesions. These are often not symmetrical and are called 'lichenoid' reactions. They tend to disappear after completion of drug therapy. Drugs that commonly cause lichenoid reactions include ones used in treatment of diabetes and high blood pressure. Also, gold salts (used to treat Rheumatoid Arthritis) can elicit these reactions.

Treatment entails reduction of the soreness that LP can produce or attempts at stopping the white patches from recurring. This latter treatment uses steroids to dampen down the Immune Response that is very much involved in LP.

In summary, Lichen Planus is a non-infectious disorder, affecting people in the age group of 30 - 70 years. It occurs both on the skin and/or in the mouth. In the mouth, it occurs as symmetrical white patches, mainly on the cheeks, on the gum and the sides of the tongue. The mean duration of these white patches is 4 1/2 years. The 'patches' are often uncomfortable but this is normally as far as it goes. Normally treatment entails reassurance and if very uncomfortable, then steroids can be administered to correct the problem.