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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: [patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk) if you would like a reference list.

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## **Oral Lichen planus** (1 of 2)

### **What is lichen planus?**

This is an inflammatory condition that can affect the inside of the mouth as well as the skin. It is relatively common affecting 2% of the population. It is more commonly found in patients over 40, women being affected more than men.

### **What does oral lichen planus look like?**

In the mouth, lichen planus is usually found on the insides of the cheeks and the side of the tongue (although it can also affect the gums or the roof of your mouth). Usually it 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. Sometimes lichen planus may be associated with red patches or ulcers.

### **What are the symptoms?**

You may have no symptoms from your oral lichen planus.

You may experience soreness or a burning sensation in your mouth which can be worse when eating and drinking. Spicy or acidic foods and alcohol can be particularly troublesome. You may find brushing your teeth is sore if your gums are affected. You may experience ulcers or sores.

### **What causes oral lichen planus?**

The cause is not fully understood, but it is likely to be related to the body's immune (defence) system. It is not infectious or contagious. It can occasionally be caused by a reaction to certain medicines or metal fillings (amalgam).

### **How is it diagnosed?**

Lichen planus can be diagnosed by an experienced doctor by looking inside your mouth. Commonly the diagnosis is confirmed with a biopsy (i.e. removal of a small sample of tissue which is looked at under a microscope.)

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## Can oral lichen planus be cured?

There is not a cure for this but different treatments are available to manage your symptoms. It may resolve spontaneously but it more often lasts for many years.

## How can oral lichen planus be treated?

Treatment may only be given if your lichen planus is symptomatic.

- antiseptic mouthwashes – can be helpful if your mouth is too sore to maintain good oral hygiene.
- steroid mouthwashes, sprays, pastes or dissolving tablets - to reduce inflammation.
- anaesthetic (numbing) mouthwash – use if your mouth is particularly sore. Can be helpful to use before eating.
- systemic steroids (i.e swallowed in tablet form) - can be used for a short period if your symptoms are particularly severe.
- occasionally medicines are given which suppress the body's immune (defence) system.

## What can I do?

- your mouth should be checked regularly by your dentist or specialist doctor so any early changes can be spotted.
- maintain a high standard of oral hygiene. Speak to your dentist or dental hygienist for advice.
- some toothpastes can aggravate your lichen planus – try a milder toothpaste or a toothpaste that does not contain Sodium Lauryl Sulphate.
- avoid spicy, acidic or salty foods if these make your mouth sore. You may find keeping a diet diary helpful to spot foods which trigger your symptoms.
- if you smoke, stop smoking. If you need help to stop smoking speak to your GP, practice nurse or local pharmacist. Alternatively visit [www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk) or call 0800 0224 332.
- limit your alcohol intake to the recommended levels.

## For further advice:

The British Dental Health Foundation offers free expert advice on oral health problems from Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, telephone 0845 063 1188 or visit [www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.dentalhealth.org)

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