



## Patient Information

# Lichen Planus of the Vulva

## What is Lichen Planus?

**Lichen Planus** is a skin condition that occurs in 0.2-1% of people. The name of this condition means 'flat bumps' and is called this because of the appearance of the rash itself. It usually occurs equally in men and women over the age of 40 years but can affect anyone of any age.

## What causes it?

The cause for this condition is still not entirely known, however the most likely theory is that the body's immune system is over-reacting to something in the environment. This over-reaction causes inflammation and a rash to appear on the skin. It can affect the skin of the vulva but also other parts of the body, mouth, hair and nails.

## Is it infectious?

No, it is not infectious or contagious meaning it cannot be passed on from one person to another.

## Is it hereditary?

No, it is not hereditary.

## What are the symptoms?

**Lichen Planus** of the vulva usually presents with intense itching, pain, soreness, pain on sexual intercourse.

If the vagina is involved some women experience a heavy vaginal discharge.

What does lichen Planus on the vulva look like?

There are different types of Lichen planus:

- **Erosive lichen Planus** is the most common type. The patches of affected skin look red raw with pink/purple edges. These patches can bleed after intercourse. As the erosions heal scarring can develop. Looking closely at the patches it may be possible to see faint white lines or streaks on top of them. These are called **Wickham's Striae**. These patches are also seen in the mouth
- **Classical Lichen Planus**. The patches are well defined and flat topped. They can be found on the vulva but also on the trunk, outer limbs and around the anus. After they have healed the skin can stay pigmented. This type frequently does not have symptoms.



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- **Hypertrophic Lichen Planus.** This is relatively rare. The warty like lesions affect the vulva and the skin around the anus. These warty plaques can become ulcerated, infected and painful.

## How is it diagnosed?

In most cases the rash of **Lichen Planus** is characteristic and a doctor or medical health professional can diagnose the condition by the look of the rash. Sometimes it can be difficult to tell the condition apart from eczema, psoriasis or a rash caused from drugs or medication. If there is any uncertainty then a sample of skin (a skin biopsy) can be taken under local anaesthetic and looked at under the microscope to confirm it.

## What is the treatment?

There is no cure for **Lichen Planus** however it usually resolves by itself. Treatment can help ease symptoms and works by relieving the itching and improving the appearance of the rash.

- **Good vulval care** – avoiding soaps, bubble baths, shower gels, wipes and deodorants around the genitals. Avoiding wearing underwear at night. Using a soap substitute (emollient). Changing to cotton underwear. Vaginal lubricants can also help during intercourse.
- Emollients (moisturisers) – are creams applied to the affected areas. They help keep the skin moisturised and dampen down the itch symptoms.
- Antihistamine tablets – these help to relieve the symptoms of itch. The main side-effect of these is drowsiness however taking these, especially before going to sleep, may aid sleep and night-time symptoms.
- Steroids (creams, ointments, tablets) – steroids decrease the inflammation in the body and hence the rash of Lichen Planus. Steroid ointment can be applied directly onto the skin.

## What is the outlook (prognosis)?

The prognosis for **Lichen Planus** is good. 50% of skin cases clear, without treatment, in 6-12 months. The rest clear soon after this. Very rarely do cases last for longer than 18 months. A minority of patients who report mouth or genital symptoms do find symptoms can last for longer. 20% of patients find that symptoms recur sometime in the future.



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## Further reading & References

- Website of British Association of Dermatologists (BAD). <http://www.bad.org.uk>
- Website of DermNet New Zealand.
- <http://www.dermnetnz.org/dna.lichen.planus/info.html>
- Website of UK Lichen Planus. <http://www.uklp.org.uk/what-is-lichen-planus>
- 2014 UK National Guideline on the Management of Vulval Conditions Clinical Effectiveness Group British Association for Sexual Health and HIV Date of writing: Feb 2014

## Contact us

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From 1st January 2019 smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

**This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email [gwh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:gwh.pals@nhs.net)**

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