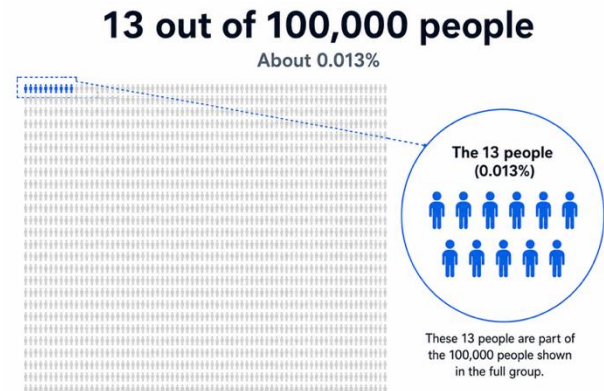

Lichen planopilaris

Lichen planopilaris (LPP) is the term given to lichen planus around the hair follicles. Anyone can develop LPP. It is seen more often in women between 40 and 60 years old, but it can occur at other ages and in men. It is a long-term condition that causes inflammation around the hair follicles, which are the tiny openings in the skin where hair grows. Over time, the inflammation can damage the follicles causing scars which can lead to permanent hair loss.

Why early treatment matters: Treatment can calm the inflammation and help prevent more permanent hair loss. Treatment works best when LPP is found early.



What causes lichen planopilaris?

While the exact cause of LPP is unknown, experts believe LPP may happen when the immune system attacks healthy hair follicles by mistake. People with LPP did nothing to cause it.

- LPP is not contagious
- It is not caused by poor hygiene
- It is not usually caused by an infection

What are the signs of lichen planopilaris?

LPP may start slowly or appear more quickly. It may affect one area or several areas of the scalp. It may also affect hair in the eyebrows or other hair-bearing areas.

You may notice:

- Patchy or slowly spreading hair loss
- Redness around individual hairs
- White scale or flakes around the hair follicles
- Itching, burning, pain, or tenderness
- Small rough bumps on the scalp
- Hairs that come out easily
- Smooth or shiny areas where the normal hair openings are gone



Important: Some people have little or no itching or pain even while hair loss is getting worse. Keep follow-up visits even when your scalp feels normal.

Can lichen planus affect other parts of the body?

Yes. Lichen planus can also affect the:

- **Skin:** red, purple, gray, brown bumps on skin
- **Mouth:** white lacy spots, redness, pain, or sores
- **Nails:** ridges, splitting, thinning, or nail loss
- **Genital skin:** pain, redness, sores, or scarring
- **Throat** (rare): pain or trouble swallowing

Tell your doctor if you have skin changes, mouth sores, genital pain, nail changes, or trouble swallowing.

How is lichen planopilaris diagnosed?

A dermatologist may use several steps to diagnose LPP:

- **Medical history:** Your doctor will ask when the hair loss started, how fast it is changing, and whether you have itching, burning, or pain
- **Scalp exam:** Your doctor will look for redness, scale, and scarring around the hair follicles
- **Magnified scalp exam:** A small magnifying tool called a dermatoscope may be used to look closely at the hair and scalp
- **Hair-pull test:** Your doctor may gently pull a few hairs to see whether the lichen planus is active
- **Scalp biopsy:** A small piece of skin may be removed after the area is numbed. The sample is checked under a microscope. A biopsy is often taken from the active edge of a hair-loss patch.

Blood tests are not used to diagnose LPP. They may be used to look for another cause of hair loss or to make sure a medication is safe for you.

What is the treatment for lichen planopilaris?

Main goal of treatment: The goal is to reduce inflammation to slow or stop hair loss, reduce symptoms, and prevent more scarring. Treatment usually cannot regrow hair from follicles that have already been scarred.

There is no single treatment that works for everyone. Your dermatologist may use one or more of the following:

- **Topical steroids:** These are often the first and most common treatment tried. Steroids for the scalp may be a liquid, foam, oil or shampoo.
- **Steroid injections into the scalp:** Small amounts of steroid are placed into active areas.
- **Non-steroid topical medications (including calcineurin inhibitors):** This may be used in some patients.

- **Systemic medications (pills) that help control the immune response:** These medications may include hydroxychloroquine, methotrexate, mycophenolate, and new classes of medications such as janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors may be used to calm the immune system.
- **Minoxidil (solution, foam, or pill forms):** Minoxidil may help the remaining, unscarred hair grow thicker. It does not repair scarred follicles.

Each of these treatments may have side effects. Talk with your doctor about the side effects of these treatments.

There are currently no FDA approved treatments for lichen planopilaris.

What can I do at home?

- **Use gentle hair care:** Avoid harsh chemicals and treatments that irritate the scalp.
- **Limit coloring, bleaching, perming and chemical straightening:** Ask your dermatologist whether these are safe for you.
- **Avoid pulling on the hair:** Limit tight braids, ponytails, extensions, wigs, or clips that place tension on the scalp.
- **Do not scratch or pick:** This can make pain and irritation worse.
- **Wash your hair as needed:** Normal shampooing does not make LPP hair loss worse. Use a gentle product if your scalp is sensitive.
- **Protect bare scalp from the sun:** Wear a hat or use sunscreen made for the scalp.
- **Use your medicine as directed:** Do not stop a prescription without talking with your doctor, but let your doctor know about any side effects from the medications.
- **Ask about cosmetic support:** Hair fibers, powders, scarves, wigs, and hairpieces may help cover thin areas.

Who treats lichen planopilaris? How often should I see them?

LPP is best treated by a dermatologist. You may need visits every few months while LPP is active. Once it is stable, visits may be less often. Long-term follow up is important because LPP can become active again.

When should I call my doctor?

Contact your dermatologist if you notice:

- Fast or sudden spread of hair loss
- New redness, scale, pain, burning, or tenderness
- Pus, drainage, fever or another sign of infection
- A new rash in the mouth, on the skin, or on the nails
- A side effect from your medication

Questions to ask at your visit

- Does my LPP look active today?
- How can we tell whether it is spreading or getting worse?
- How long will my medication take to work?
- What side effects should I watch for?
- When should I return?

Other Resources:

- American Academy of Dermatology <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/a-z/lichen-planus-overview>
- British Association of Dermatology <https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/lichen-planopilaris>
- Scarring Alopecia Foundation <https://scarringalopecia.org/lichen-planopilaris>

Authors: Michael Povelaitis (medical student), Dr. Donna Culton
<https://www.lichenplanusfoundation.org>



THE INTERNATIONAL
**Lichen Planus
Foundation**