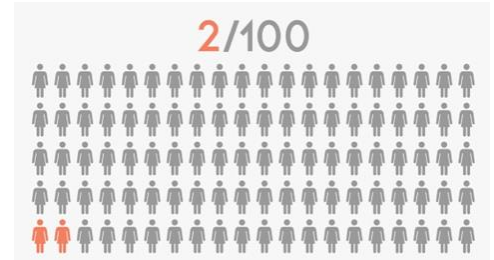


Oral Lichen Planus

Oral lichen planus is a condition that affects the inside of the mouth. It is typically a chronic condition but can be controlled with treatment. Oral lichen planus cannot be spread between people (it is not contagious). This condition affects around two people out of every one hundred people. It is more common in middle-aged women but can occur in anyone.



What causes oral lichen planus?

Oral lichen planus is caused by the immune system attacking the healthy cells of the mouth. The reason the immune system attacks is unknown. Things that may trigger or worsen oral lichen planus include:

- Certain medicines (drugs)
- Infections, including hepatitis C or yeast (which can worsen or complicate oral lichen planus)
- Injury (like biting your cheek or tongue or trauma to the oral tissues)
- Stress may make it worse

What are the signs of oral lichen planus?

Spots in your mouth that do not look normal:

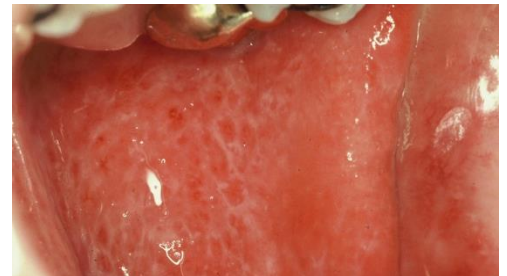
- Spots in your mouth that are white and lacy (they may or may not be raised and they may or may not be painful)
- Spots in your mouth that are red, painful, and are swollen
- Open sores in your mouth that are painful

These spots may appear on the:

- Inside of your cheeks (the most common place)
- Inside of your lips
- Tongue
- Gums
- Roof of your mouth

Other things you may notice:

- Burning sensation of the mouth
- Spots that are painful
- More tenderness or pain when you eat spicy, hot, or acidic foods
- Inflamed gums that bleed easily with brushing
- Pain when you speak, chew, or swallow



White, lacy spots on the inner cheek



What can oral lichen planus lead to?

- Mouth pain
- Stress
- Feeling sad
- Weight loss
- Infections in your mouth (usually yeast)
- Mouth cancer (very rare, more often seen when ulcers are not well controlled with treatment)

Can lichen planus affect other parts of the body?

Yes. Lichen planus may also affect the:

- **Skin:** red or brown flat bumps that may be itchy
- **Scalp:** itching, redness, scaling, or hair loss
- **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, genital pain, hair loss, nail changes, or trouble swallowing.

How is oral lichen planus diagnosed?

Your doctor might diagnose oral lichen planus by asking about your medical and dental history, the symptoms that you have, and looking inside of your mouth.

Tests may be done:

- **Biopsy:** a small piece of tissue is taken from spots in your mouth. A doctor may take several biopsies to increase the chance of making the diagnosis. This tissue will be looked at under a microscope. They may need to run more special tests on the tissue.
- **Tests for virus, bacteria or fungus:** Cultures or PCR testing may be done using a cotton swab touched to your mouth tissue. The doctor will use this sample to see if there are any viruses, bacteria, or fungus.

What is the treatment for oral lichen planus?

You and your doctor will work as a team to find treatments that control your symptoms and manage your condition. You may not need treatment if you have white, lacy areas that are not painful. If you have symptoms, your doctor may prescribe:

- **Numbing Medicine**
 - Medicine that numbs the spots to make them less painful
- **Steroids:** The most common first treatment which can help when your mouth is inflamed. They may be in the form of:
 - Swish, ointment or gel

- Pills for more severe condition
- Shots into stubborn areas
- **Systemic medicines (pills) that control your body's immune response**
 - Pills such as metronidazole, hydroxychloroquine, methotrexate, acitretin, mycophenolate and newer classes of medications such as janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors may be used if lichen planus is severe and does not improve with other treatments.

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

There are no currently FDA approved treatments for oral lichen planus.

What can I do at home?

- **Brush your teeth at least two times a day using bland toothpaste and a soft toothbrush.** This will keep your mouth clean. This helps to lessen symptoms and prevent infection.
- **Change your diet.** Decrease salty, spicy or acidic food (citrus fruits, tomatoes, vinegar) if they seem to make your symptoms worse or cause flare-ups. Also, reduce or cut out caffeine, like coffee or tea.
- **Avoid triggers.** Certain things may trigger your condition or make it worse. These things could include certain foods, alcohol/alcohol based mouth washes, or stress.
- **Minimize and manage stress when possible.** Stress can make oral lichen planus worse. Consider strategies that help your body recover from stress like meditation, journaling, and therapy.
- **Minimize oral trauma.** Use soft toothbrush, avoid crunchy foods with sharp edges, ask your hygienist to use gentle cleaning methods and avoid the use of polishing paste during cleanings which can be irritating to sensitive tissues, and avoid deep cleanings particularly while your condition is still active as this can lead to trauma/flare.

Who treats oral lichen planus? How often should I see them?

There are many doctors who can treat oral lichen planus. They include skin doctors (dermatologists), oral health specialists (oral medicine or oral pathology providers), gum doctors (periodontists), general dentists, and ENT (ears, nose, and throat) doctors. How often you need follow-up depends on how severe the lichen planus is and what treatments you are on. They will ask you about your symptoms, look inside of your mouth, and prescribe or refill medicine. Oral lichen planus carries a small risk of oral cancer, so your doctor may recommend periodic exams and biopsies of any changing or concerning areas to monitor over time. Follow up is important to monitor your oral lichen planus.

Questions to ask at your visit

- Does my oral lichen planus 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>
- American Academy of Oral Medicine <https://www.aaom.com/oral-lichen-planus>

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