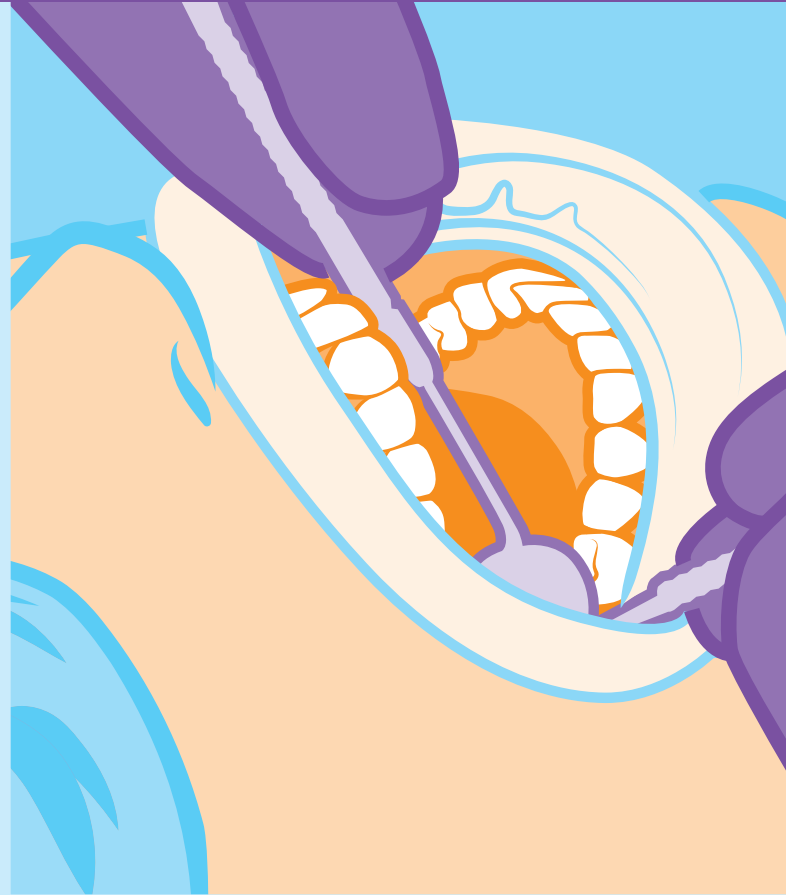


The purpose of this leaflet is to help you understand more about oral lichen planus. If you have any further questions or concerns after reading this leaflet, please ask a member of the surgical team looking after your care.



Lichen planus is an inflammatory condition of the skin which can also affect the mouth (oral lichen planus). Oral lichen planus may occur on its own or in combination with lichen planus of the skin, nails or genitals. It affects 1 to 2% of the population, and commonly affects those aged over 40 years and women. Men and younger adults can also have oral lichen planus, but children are rarely affected.

What causes oral lichen planus?

The cause of oral lichen planus is not completely understood, but it is likely to have something to do with the body's immune system. Oral lichen planus is not an infection and it is not contagious, so it cannot be passed from person to person.

In a small number of cases, lesions (areas of abnormal tissue in the mouth), which resemble those of lichen planus can be caused by some medicines. These include some drugs prescribed for high blood pressure and diabetes, or dental filling materials, such as dental amalgam. In these cases where a cause has been identified, the condition is called oral lichenoid reaction.

How is oral lichen planus diagnosed?

Your dentist or doctor may be able to make a diagnosis of oral lichen planus based on its appearance in your mouth. However, it is often necessary to take a small sample (biopsy) from an affected area inside the mouth for examination under a microscope. This is a simple procedure and is usually done under local anaesthetic (numbing injection).

What are the symptoms?

- Oral lichen planus may be asymptomatic (cause no symptoms).
- It may be associated with oral discomfort often described as a burning or stinging sensation.
- Spicy foods, citrus fruits and alcohol can be particularly troublesome.
- If your gums are affected, they may become tender and tooth-brushing can be uncomfortable.
- Ulcers, often called erosions, may occur and these are especially painful.
- Around 15% of patients may develop lesions on the skin of their bodies also.

What does oral lichen planus look like?

Typically, oral lichen planus presents as a white, lace-like pattern on the inner surfaces of the cheeks and tongue. However, it can appear as white and red patches or as areas of ulceration anywhere on the lining of the mouth. Involvement of the gums with oral lichen planus is known as desquamative gingivitis. This causes your gums to become red and shiny.



Can oral lichen planus be cured?

In most cases oral lichen planus cannot be cured, but in some cases may go away by itself after a long period of time. There are treatments which can be used to reduce the symptoms. In rare cases where oral lichenoid lesions are thought to be caused by medicines or dental filling materials, changing these may result in an improvement or resolution. These changes should only be undertaken with specialist advice and under medical supervision.

