Many women feel frightened when they are first told that they have lichen planus. You may find the treatments and appointments embarrassing and frightening, and you may feel tense, tearful or withdrawn. If we can help in any way please ask us and we will do all we can to help you feel more comfortable.

Contact us
Colposcopy and Vulval Clinic
Open 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday
01872 2522360

Eden ward (Gynaecology ward)
Open 24 hours
01872 252090 or 253163

Dermatology Specialist Nurses
Secretary – Emma Merrill
01872 252123

Further information
Further information and support is available from:

UK Lichen Planus
www.uklp.org.uk
Telephone: 0751 443 2552

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690
What is lichen planus?
This is a condition that mainly affects the skin, causing an itchy rash. It can affect the skin, mouth, genitals, scalp, nails and rarely, other parts of the body.

- Lichen planus is a recurrent rash due to inflammation.
- The rash is itchy and non-infectious.
- It affects around 1-2% of the population.
- The rash can affect many areas of the body such as the arms, legs, back, scalp and nails. It can also affect the lining (mucous membrane) of the mouth. Other areas that can be affected in women include the vulva and the vagina.

This leaflet contains information for patients with lichen planus of the vulval area.

What are the symptoms?

- Chronic soreness and/or itching of the vulval area.
- The vulval skin becomes more fragile than normal.
- You may notice that the area around the opening to the vagina becomes red and shiny.
- Inflammation and sometimes swelling.
- Susceptibility to infection.
- The vulva may become distorted, causing change in shape/size.
- The vagina may become narrowed or blocked inside.
- You may experience pain and difficulties with sexual intercourse.
- Pain and difficulty when passing urine.

You may not experience all of these symptoms – some women may only experience soreness, or have no symptoms at all.

Who can get lichen planus?
Lichen planus of the skin can affect both men and women. However, oral (mouth) lichen planus is more common among women. In around 50% of all cases of lichen planus the mouth is affected. The condition is more common in adults over 40 years of age. Lichen planus is not infectious, does not usually run in families and cannot be passed on to others.

What are the causes?
The cause of lichen planus is unknown. However, it is thought that the causes of the condition may be related to:
- The immune system (the body’s natural defence against infection)
- A reaction to certain types of medication

How is it diagnosed and treated?
Diagnosis can be a long process. Referral to a specialist is usually necessary. Often experienced specialists can say by examination, that this is what they think the condition is, but to get an accurate diagnosis a vulval biopsy may be necessary.

You may be started on a course of steroid ointment with instructions on how and when to apply it. This should reduce the inflammation. You may then be reviewed in the clinic again in three to six months to see if this course of treatment has worked. This treatment is safe, can often control the symptoms very well, and can help women go back to a normal life.

There is no permanent cure for lichen planus, so treatments aim to ease the symptoms. Mild cases of lichen planus may not require treatment.

What can I do to help myself?
- Avoid washing with soaps/bubble bath.
- Do not let affected areas of skin come into contact with shampoo and conditioner.
- Use an emollient to moisturise the area.
- Wear cotton underwear.
- Wear stockings instead of tights.
- Wear loose fitting clothes (avoid trousers/jeans).
- Apply the prescribed cream/ointment to the affected area as instructed.

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