



HCSP FACT SHEET

HCV ADVOCATE

• EXTRAHEPATIC MANIFESTATION OF HCV •

Lichen Planus

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Foreword

Lichen planus is a fairly common skin disorder that lasts for months to years. Lichen planus affects about 1 to 2% of the U.S. population and usually affects people between the ages of 30 and 70 years old and is slightly more prevalent in women than in men. The exact cause of lichen planus is unknown, but it seems to be triggered by stress, genetics, allergic reactions to medicines, and by viral infections such as hepatitis C. The onset may be gradual or quick. There have been studies that have found a prevalence of HCV in people with lichen planus from 3.5% to 60%. For this reason, it has been recommended that people with lichen planus (especially with elevated liver enzymes) should be tested for HCV.

Lichen planus typically affects the skin, nails, vulva, penis, and mucous membranes including the mouth. The symptoms appear as purple or plaque-like shiny flat-topped itchy bumps. Lichen planus is not an infectious disease so it can not be transmitted to others. There is no cure for lichen planus, but treatment is effective in alleviating the symptoms (itching of the skin lesions) and improves the appearance of the rashes. In addition certain treatments can resolve some of the symptoms associated with lichen planus and some symptoms will naturally resolve. However, since lichen planus cannot be cured, the condition may return.

Important note: Everyone with hepatitis C should be evaluated and receive HCV treatment. Current treatment is very expensive, and some insurance companies and Medicaid/Medicare are restricting HCV treatment to people with the most severe HCV disease. One of the symptoms that qualify people for HCV treatment is severe extrahepatic conditions. Discuss any symptoms with your medical provider and have them recorded in your medical records. If you are not approved for the drugs to treat hepatitis C, you may qualify for free drugs or co-pay assistance through a pharmaceutical patient assistance program. More information is available at the end of this fact sheet.

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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HCV – Lichen Planus

Mouth

Oral lichen planus is an inflammatory condition that affects the lining of the mouth, usually on the inside of the cheeks, but it can also affect the gums, tongue and inner cheeks of the mouth. Although rare it can also affect the throat or esophagus.

Symptoms: The symptoms appear as white, interconnecting lines which resemble and are named after the lichen plant, but lichen planus is NOT related in any way to the plant. Severe cases may involve painful sores and ulcers of the mouth. Very severe cases of lichen planus of the mouth can slightly increase the risk of oral cancer.

Lichen planus that affects the mouth is generally found by a dentist or dental hygienist. The diagnosis may be confirmed by a biopsy. Yeast infections are commonly found in association with lichen planus or can be triggered by topical steroids used to treat it. Treatment of the yeast infection sometimes improves the symptoms of oral lichen planus.

Management: It is important to control the disease with medications, good oral hygiene, and regular physical exams to monitor any changes. Alcohol, tobacco, spicy foods, peppermint, cinnamon, citrus type foods and stressful situations trigger the symptoms and should be avoided if possible.

Treatment: Oral lichen planus treatment includes the use of topical steroids as well as controlling the triggers. Regular dental exams are recommended to look for any tissue changes. Teeth cleaning and good personal oral hygiene will improve the symptoms.

Skin

Lichen planus most commonly affects the skin—including the genitals.

Symptoms: Bumps can appear on any skin surface, but are most often found on the inside of the wrists and an-

gles, the lower legs, back, and genital regions. In severe cases, the bumps can be extremely itchy and painful. When the lesions heal the skin may become discolored. The skin discoloration usually fades but may cause scarring especially when the scalp is involved.

Management: Strategies to reduce the symptoms include the use of oatmeal baths (Aveeno), cool compresses to the affected area of the skin, and anti-itch topical creams.

Treatment: The most common treatments include topical steroids and antihistamines used to relieve the itching. Severe cases may require the use of oral corticosteroids such as cortisone or prednisone. Extreme cases may require photo chemotherapy light treatment and prescription drugs to help control and alleviate the symptoms.



Hair

Lichen planus can affect the scalp and hair.

Symptoms: Hair thinning, redness of the scalp and hair loss can occur. If left untreated it can cause permanent scarring and inflammation of hair follicles leading to permanent hair loss (alopecia).

Treatment: To prevent permanent damage, oral steroids, plus topical steroids as well as prescribed oral medications should be taken as soon as possible to prevent permanent damage.

Nails

Lichen planus can also affect the nails leading to damage of the nail root.

Symptoms: Nail splitting, grooving of the surface of the nail and the nails can become thin and brittle and possible nail loss. In severe cases the nail loss can result in permanent nail root damage.

Treatment: severe cases are treated with a combination of approaches that include immunosuppressive drugs.

HCV – Lichen Planus

Check out the following publications:

- **An Overview of Extrahepatic Manifestations**
http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Extrahepatic.pdf
- **Patient Assistance Programs**
http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Patient_Assistance.pdf
- **Skin Conditions**
http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Skin_Conditions_Scatena.pdf

For more information

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Academy of Dermatology
 www.aad.org/skin-conditions/dermatology-a-to-z/lichen-planus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayo Clinic
 www.mayoclinic.com • Pubmed Health
 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001870/ |
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Visit our websites to learn more about viral hepatitis:

www.hcvadvocate.org • www.hbadvocate.org
www.hepatitistattoos.org

Glossary of Terms

ANTI-HISTAMINES:

Medications that work by blocking the effects of the body's release of histamine to counter an allergic reaction.

DENTAL HYGIENIST:

A licensed dental professional who specializes in preventative oral health.

INFLAMMATION:

The body's response to tissue injury or infection, typically characterized by redness, swelling, heat, and pain.

PHOTO CHEMOTHERAPY:

A treatment that consists of a

photosensitizing drug that is followed by exposure to sunlight or ultraviolet radiation.

STEROID:

A family of substances that share a similar chemical structure, including certain hormones (e.g., testosterone) and various drugs. Topical steroids are applied to the skin.

YEAST INFECTION:

An overgrowth of certain fungi that can result in infections of the esophagus, mouth, digestive tract, skin, esophagus, vagina and other parts of the body.

