

The Bare Facts

1. Lichen planopilaris is lichen planus on the scalp.
2. The cause of lichen planopilaris is unknown, but it causes inflammation that leads to scarring hair loss where follicles are destroyed.
3. If left untreated, lichen planopilaris bald patches will enlarge to a certain point and then stop. When this will happen is unpredictable.
4. Aim of treatment is to stop the inflammation; no one medication is suitable for everyone.

Where to look for help

1. Your local doctor should be your first point of call, he or she will be able to refer you to a dermatologist for an opinion.
2. Be careful of bogus hair treatments; most are harmless, but many are expensive.
3. More information can be found on our website:

[www. alopecia.com.au](http://www alopecia.com.au)

Understanding

Lichen Planopilaris

The Australasian Hair and Wool Research Society
Department of Dermatology
St. Vincent's Hospital
41 Victoria Parade
Fitzroy VIC 3065

The Skin and Cancer Foundation (VIC)
95 Rathdowne Street
Carlton VIC 3053



Lichen planus is a disorder that can affect the skin, the mouth, the hair and the nails. When it affects the hair it is often called lichen planopilaris. **Lichen planopilaris** can sometimes occur without any involvement of the skin or nails and in these cases, it is sometimes difficult to be certain of the diagnosis.

The cause of lichen planus is unknown. While certain drugs can cause lichen planus on the skin it is difficult to know if they can also cause it on the scalp. When a drug causes lichen planus on the skin it may occur two or three years after starting the medication. Whether changing your medications will help the scalp is not known.

A biopsy is always required to establish the diagnosis, however, the biopsy is not always conclusive and hence the diagnosis is not always able to be conclusively established.

The inflammation in the scalp produced by the lichen planopilaris actually destroys the hair bulbs. This means once the hairs are lost there is no potential for them to regrow. This is analogous to daffodils where, as long as there is a bulb in the ground, a new daffodil will appear each spring. If

the bulb is destroyed, the daffodils stop appearing.

Once lichen planopilaris develops it is difficult to predict what will happen over time without treatment. In general we would expect that without



treatment the area would progress and enlarge up until a point before the condition spontaneously stops and burns out. Why this happens we don't know. When this happens we cannot predict. Sometimes we see patients who have had their lichen planus for many years and it does not seem to be extending as it has already burnt out.

If the inflammation can be fully controlled it is

sometimes possible to transplant hairs to conceal the hair loss. This is the secondary aim.

Controlling the inflammation is not always easy and there is no one medication that is effective for everybody. It is common to have to try a number of different medications before we find one that is effective. Whilst we cannot stop the inflammation in everybody we are successful in a fair proportion of people. Unfortunately, we cannot predict in advance who is going to benefit from the treatment.

If lichen planus does occur on the skin elsewhere it generally appears as either multiple tiny pin head sized red lumps on the skin or as red bumps, particularly on the front of the wrists and the shins.

When lichen planus affects the nails, it can produce a thinning of the nails or roughening of the nails. When lichen planus affects the mouth it produces white areas that may be sore.

Lichen planus does not seem to be hereditary and no triggers have been identified. **It is not contagious and lichen planopilaris does not predispose to cancer.**