



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Oral leukoplakia is a general term to describe a white patch on the mouth. It affects all ages, but it is most common in adults over 60, and in men more than in women. Hairy leukoplakia is a different disorder, and it occurs in people who have a weak immune system due to drugs or illness. Another form of leukoplakia occurs in the genitals of women.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- A white or off-white patch in the membranes of the mouth. The patch may be tiny or the size of a quarter. It can involve the lips, inside of the cheek, floor and roof of the mouth, tongue, or gums. It is not painful.
- The patch feels firm, rough and stiff. It can not be rubbed off.
- The area may be more sensitive when touched or when eating hot or spicy foods.
- It is sometimes first noticed by a dentist when doing a dental exam.

### CAUSES

In some cases, the cause is unknown. Certain risk factors, such as smoking, may cause the disorder. It can not be spread from one person to another.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Use of tobacco products, including cigarettes, chewing tobacco, snuff, pipes, or cigars.
- Repeated trauma to the mouth or tongue such as from a sharp or broken tooth or from dentures.
- Excess alcohol use.
- Infections such as candidiasis, syphilis, or Epstein-Barr virus.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- No specific preventive measures.
- For many health reasons, don't smoke or use tobacco products, and avoid alcohol.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Leukoplakia by itself does not cause any problems and does not require treatment. The concern is that it may be pre-cancerous, and that makes it important to have it diagnosed. In the majority of cases, cancer will not develop.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- In a small percent of cases, cancer may develop.
- Leukoplakia may recur if the problem causing it (such as tobacco use) is not stopped.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider can diagnose the disorder with a physical exam of the mouth and tongue. A biopsy is usually done if a pre-cancerous risk is suspected. The biopsy involves the removal of a small amount of skin tissue to be viewed under a microscope.
- Follow-up care may involve a wait-and-watch plan to see if any changes occur in the affected area. Drugs may be prescribed, or surgery may be recommended. Your health care provider will discuss the options with you.
- Stop any tobacco use and/or alcohol use (including alcoholic mouthwashes).
- Get treatment for any tooth problems or have any denture problems fixed.

### MEDICATIONS

- Topical or oral forms of vitamin A may be prescribed.
- Other forms of treatment are currently undergoing study.

### ACTIVITY

No limits.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has symptoms of leukoplakia.

Special notes:

---

---

---

More notes on the back of this page