Leukoplakia

Leukoplakia occurs when white patches develop in your mouth. They may show up on the insides of your cheeks, on or under your tongue, or on your gums. Leukoplakia can also develop on the outside of the female genitalia (*vulva*). In rare cases, it can occur in the area around the anus.

In some cases, **leukoplakia predicts an increased risk of cancer.**

CAUSES

Some of the many conditions that can cause or increase the risk of leukoplakia in the mouth include:

- Irritation from rough teeth or dentures.
- **Any type of tobacco use, especially with alcohol.**
- Weakened immune system (such as occurs with HIV/AIDS or after a bone marrow transplant).

Many conditions can also cause or increase the risk of leukoplakia of the vulva including:

- Long lasting infections of the vulva.
- Some skin diseases.
- Long lasting irritation of the vulva.
- Long-term use of steroid creams or ointments.
- Weakened immune system (such as occurs with HIV/AIDS or after a bone marrow transplant).

SYMPTOMS

The main symptom is the development of patches or flat areas in the mouth or on the vulva. These patches may be:

- Odd-shaped.
- Hard.
- Raised.
- White or grey in color (although may be reddened).
- Unable to be wiped or scraped away.
- Fuzzy.
- Sensitive to spicy or acidic foods, touch or heat.

DIAGNOSIS

- Due to its distinct appearance, diagnosis of leukoplakia is often straightforward.
- Your caregiver may choose to take a sample (*biopsy*) of a patch. Your caregiver may choose to take a sample (*biopsy*) of a patch, to verify that it is leukoplakia, and to make sure that it is not a form of cancer.

TREATMENT

Leukoplakia is treated by:

- Stopping tobacco use.
- Repairing any rough teeth or dentures.
- Surgical removal of the patch, using surgical knife (*scalpel*), laser, heat or cold.
- Medicines that can be applied to the patches.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- **Do not** use any form of tobacco.
- Check with the dentist to see if you need any repairs.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Avoid foods or beverages that seem to irritate the leukoplakia.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF YOU:

- Notice more patches of leukoplakia.
- Notice changes in size, shape or feeling of existing patches.
- You develop fever (more than 100.5° F (38.1° C).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU:

- The patch becomes extremely painful, and the pain is not helped with prescribed medicine.
- The patch begins to bleed, and you cannot stop the bleeding.
- Have a patch in the mouth that becomes so swollen that it you have trouble eating and/or breathing.
- Have a patch at the vulva that becomes so swollen that you have trouble passing urine.
- An unexplained oral temperature above 102.0° F (38.9° C) develops.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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