Lichen planus (LP) is a rare, chronic, inflammatory autoimmune skin and mucous membrane disease. LP most commonly presents as itchy, shiny, reddish-purple spots (lesions) on the skin (cutaneous LP) or as white-gray lesions in the mouth or on the lips (oral LP). Less commonly, LP may also involve the genitals (penile or vulvar LP), scalp (lichen planopilaris), ears (otic LP), nails, eyes, and esophagus. Similar to lichen found growing on trees and rocks in forests, the skin lesions are often flat-topped and can be somewhat scaly, hence the name "lichen" planus. In most affected individuals, the exact cause of LP is unclear. It is suspected that exposure to infections, drugs, allergens, or injury may sensitize the immune system and cause the immune system to attack skin cells. This initial eruption may persist for weeks to months, and recurrences can continue throughout the individual's lifetime. There have been reports of LP in family members, indicating that there may be a genetic predisposition, but the genetic factors of LP are still being researched and are uncertain. There is limited data on how many people are affected by LP, but most studies estimate that LP occurs in less than 1 percent of the world's population. Cutaneous LP occurs at similar frequencies in men and women, but women are somewhat more likely to develop oral LP or lichen planopilaris. There does not appear to be a racial predisposition for the disease. The majority of LP develops between 30 and 60 years of age but can affect older and younger individuals as well. In rare cases, children may be affected.