

White Patches on the Tongue

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A 5-year-old girl presents with white patches on the tongue that have been appearing on and off for the past year. The patches are asymptomatic. The child has not been on antibiotics for at least two years.

What is your Diagnosis?

Geographic tongue, also known as benign migratory glossitis, is an inflammatory disorder of the mucosa of the tongue. The prevalence ranges between 1 and 2.5% in the pediatric age group. The condition occurs more commonly in children, and its frequency diminishes with age. Most cases are idiopathic.

Clinically, geographic tongue presents as multifocal, circinate or irregular erythematous patches that represent loss of filiform papillae. There is often a slightly elevated white or yellowish-white border. These lesions tend to change in shape, size, and location over time. They heal spontaneously but reappear at another site. The majority of patients are asymptomatic and the lesion is often discovered during routine oral examination.



Figure 1: White patches on the tongue

Rarely, affected individuals experience discomfort, pain, stinging, or burning sensation when eating spicy or acidic foods. The diagnosis is mainly clinical. No treatment is required, apart from reassurance.

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