

## Discoloured Tongue

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This 40-year-old, healthy male was seen for evaluation of an otherwise asymptomatic problem with the appearance of his tongue.

### What is your Diagnosis?

Upon first looking at the tongue, multiple anomalies, which may or may not indicate a disease state, are shown.

The photo shows two benign conditions. The anterior changes are typical of geographic tongue (benign migratory glossitis) with well-demarcated areas of redness and a white serpiginous border. Its appearance may change from day-to-day, eventually disappearing.

The posterior changes are typical of black hairy tongue, which is also benign, but of a different structure. It shows an accentuation of keratin in the tips of the filiform papillae, while, with geographic tongue, there is an atrophy of these papillae.

Factors affecting the darker discolouration of the mid-posterior tongue include smoking, poor oral hygiene, and staining from food products. These factors should be addressed.



Figure 1: Discoloured Tongue

Scraping the surface of the tongue has been advocated as a method of reducing the build-up of keratinous debris, but it is not always helpful.

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