

Managing geographic tongue

Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery

Information for Patients

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What is geographic tongue?

Geographic tongue is a common condition. It is not a serious.

The word geographic is used as it looks like a map on your tongue. It happens to around 680,000 to 2.4 million (1 to 3%) of the population. It affects females more. It can be found in all age groups. It is mostly seen in adults.

The lining in your mouth sheds the same way your skin does. With geographic tongue some areas of the tongue replaces itself too quickly. This leaves a red patch while the areas around it take longer to be replaced. This makes it look whiter at the edges of the red patch.

There may also be cracks or splits on the tongue. You will notice over a few weeks to months that the positions of the patches change and the appearance of the map is different.

Geographic tongue is not contagious. You cannot pass it to others. In most cases, geographic tongue does not have any symptoms. Your tongue may become more likely to get thrush. This will make it more inflamed (red) and sore.

You may also notice your tongue has become more sensitive to spicy, citrus or acidic foods.

What causes it?

We do not know what causes geographic tongue. It is one type of the normal look to the tongue. It is also often linked with psoriasis, asthma, eczema and contact skin allergies.

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net



How is it diagnosed?

We will ask about the red patches and/or any symptoms, and examine your mouth. Tell the doctor if you have any similar skin changes elsewhere.

If the patch is not there when you are seen, we may need to see you again. You can bring in a photograph taken on your mobile phone of the patches on your tongue. We often do not need to carry out a biopsy to confirm the diagnosis. We may suggest a biopsy if the history and appearance is unlike geographic tongue. Or if you are concerned and would like a definite diagnosis to be sure.

We may need to do a blood test to see if you have anaemia or vitamin deficiencies. These can also cause a burning feeling similar to geographic tongue.

Treatment

There is **no cure** for geographic tongue.

- You need to keep good oral hygiene. Only use mild toothpaste without sodium laurel sulphate (SLS). Do not use mouthwashes as they may have alcohol which causes irritation.
- Getting symptoms of thrush is a common problem with geographic tongue. We can prescribe anti-fungal medication or your dentist or doctor can give it to you.
- You can buy over the counter medications from your local pharmacist. You can use this to numb the sore areas giving short term relief. You can use this before and after eating. They should **not** be used long-term as they may also be an irritant.
- Avoid foods that cause irritation, or make symptoms worse. You may think about keeping a food diary which may help to notice the foods that make your symptoms worse.

Contact details

Maxillofacial Unit, call between 8:30am to 5pm on:

Reception: **0116 258 5301**

Nurses Station: **0116 258 5671**

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل
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ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

Previous reference:

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