

Questions

If you have any other questions that have not been answered by this leaflet, please make sure that you contact your doctor.

Contact details

Oral and Maxillofacial Department
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Telephone: Lister Department, Stevenage ☎ 01438 284060
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Monday to Thursday, 8.30am - 5pm
and Friday, 8.30am - 1pm.

Out of these working hours please contact:
Luton and Dunstable Hospital out of hours service ☎ **01582 491166**
and **ask for the maxillofacial doctor on call.**

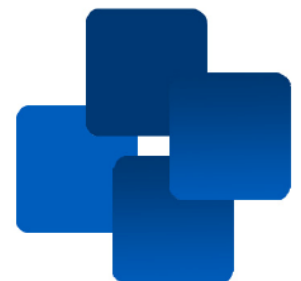
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Patient Information

Geographic Tongue

Oral and Maxillofacial Department



Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to help you understand about geographic tongue.

What is geographic tongue?

Geographic tongue is a condition where irregular smooth, red patches that have a white or light-coloured border occur on the tongue. It's called geographic tongue because the patches have a map-like appearance.

The patches can vary in size, and may occur on one area of the tongue before moving to another area after a few days, weeks or months.

What causes geographic tongue?

Although its cause is uncertain, geographic tongue has been found to run in families and occurs more frequently in people who suffer with environmental sensitivities/allergies, such as eczema and asthma.

Who does it affect?

Geographic tongue affects approximately 3% of the population. It can affect all age groups and is commonly first noticed in infancy. Geographic tongue is not something that can be passed on to others as it is not an infection.

What are the symptoms?

- Smooth, red and slightly raised patches on the tongue;
- Light coloured grey/yellow or whitish borders;
- The position of the patches change over time;
- Generally painless but in some people, the patches can feel sore or sensitive when consuming certain foods and drinks.

See your GP or dentist if you have persistent, discoloured or painful patches on your tongue.

How is it diagnosed?

As it has such a distinctive appearance, geographic tongue can be diagnosed by a doctor or dentist without the need for any tests.

How is it treated?

There are no known cures or specific treatments for it, however, there are ways of reducing the discomfort felt, such as avoiding acidic, spicy or hot food and drinks.

Simple mouthwashes can be obtained on prescription from your doctor or dentist, and you may be able to manage the pain by taking over-the-counter painkillers – speak to your pharmacist for advice.

Should I worry about geographic tongue?

No. Geographic tongue is a common, benign, harmless condition. Some people with geographic tongue find it improves over time, while for others it may be more persistent. Regular dental check ups are advised to monitor the tongue and provide peace of mind.