

# Geographic tongue



## Information for patients

Charles Clifford Dental Hospital



In hospital and in the community

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## **What is geographic tongue?**

Geographic tongue is a common condition but the cause is unknown. It usually affects the top surface of the tongue where red patches are visible often surrounded by white lines. It can also affect the undersurface and sides of the tongue. You may notice the little red bumps known as papillae on your tongue are missing inside the red patches. This then makes areas of the tongue appear smooth or flat.

Over days, weeks or months you may notice that these red patches move to a different place on your tongue. The map like appearance gives geographic tongue its name and is why geographic tongue is also called "erythema migrans" in Latin (migrating redness).

## **Who does it affect?**

It can affect anyone at any age. It is not infectious. Other members of your family may have this. Sometimes it can be associated with psoriasis.

## **How will it affect me?**

Many people with geographic tongue have no symptoms and may be unaware of the changes on their tongue. However, sometimes you may feel a burning sensation on your tongue and the tongue may be irritated by hot, spicy and acidic foods.

## **How is it treated?**

No treatment is needed. The condition is usually diagnosed easily by your dentist, doctor or hospital specialist. Tests are usually not needed, but occasionally blood tests to check certain vitamin levels are arranged.

Citrus fruits and chillies should be avoided.

If your tongue does burn, there are certain mouthwashes and sprays you can try such as Difflam 0.15% mouthwash. Geographic tongue has no long term consequences.

## **Will it go away?**

Geographic tongue is a lifelong, harmless condition.

It may not cause you any symptoms but for some it may be persistent and uncomfortable.



**Geographic tongue**

## **Other sources of information**

[www.dentalhealth.org/tell-me-about/topic/mouthconditions/geographic-tongue](http://www.dentalhealth.org/tell-me-about/topic/mouthconditions/geographic-tongue)

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002044](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002044)



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