

Black hairy tongue

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of any forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the commonly asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation, please ask.

What is black hairy tongue?

Black hairy tongue is the name given to the appearance of an abnormal coating of the tongue. It is a non-cancerous condition caused by the papillae (finger-like projections overgrowing on the surface of the tongue).

Why does it happen?

The cause is unknown although there are some contributing factors known to cause this.

Contributing factors include:

- Poor oral hygiene
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Stains from food and drink
- Use of chlorhexidine mouthwash (e.g. Corsodyl) may cause staining of the papillae

Often there are no symptoms other than the unpleasant appearance or anxiety over its cause. Some patients complain of gagging, nausea, altered taste or halitosis.

What is the treatment?

Good oral hygiene is essential as is stopping smoking. Other recognised treatments include brushing with a soft toothbrush and eating fresh pineapple (not tinned or pasteurized) – it contains a proteolytic enzyme called Bromelaine that can break down the overgrown papillae.

Contacting us

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Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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