Lingua Villosa Nigra

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An 81-year-old female patient was admitted for conservative treatment of a humeral fracture. The physical examination revealed a black hairy tongue (Picture). The patient reported no symptoms.

The black hairy tongue, also termed “lingua villosa nigra” is a benign disorder. Its prevalence increases with age (1). Symptoms such as nausea, halitosis, dysgeusia may be present. Macroscopically, one distinguishes a brownish-black or yellow coating of the tongue, with “hair-like” projections, corresponding to hypertrophic, elongated filiform papillae (2). The discolouration may be due to chromogenic organisms (e.g. Candida species), extrinsic factors (tea, coffee, alcohol, smoking), medications (e.g. tetracycline, bismuth, linezolid, olanzapine, erythromycin) and poor oral hygiene.

Our patient reported active smoking, occasional coffee and alcohol consumption. Cultures disclosed the presence of Candida glabrata. Brushing of the tongue with a soft toothbrush and topical tretinoin achieved a decrease of the discoloration and the length of the papillae after one week of treatment.

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References