

The black hairy tongue phenomenon

O fenómeno da língua vilosa nigra

Maria Limbert*¹, Francisca Amaral², Patrícia Maio³, and Duarte Rebelo⁴

Serviço de Pediatria, Hospital de Cascais, Cascais, Lisboa, Portugal

Keypoints

What is known

- *Lingua villosa nigra* is a benign condition characterized by an abnormal brownish-black coating of the tongue¹⁻⁴.
- Predisposing factors include poor oral hygiene, certain medications, smoking, and xerostomia¹⁻³.
- First-line treatments include practicing good oral hygiene, discontinuing predisposing habits or medications, and gentle brushing or scraping of the tongue^{2,4}.

What is added

- Black hairy tongue usually appears in people over 40 years of age, being uncommon in infants².
- Diagnosis is clinical, following a thorough anamnesis and a simple, gentle scrape test with a tongue depressor or toothbrush²⁻⁴.
- To prevent infants from undergoing unnecessary diagnostic procedures and treatments, it is important to be aware of this clinical entity²⁻⁴.

A previously healthy, exclusively breastfed three-month-old female presented in the emergency room because of a persistent black coloration of her tongue, which had developed over the course of two weeks. She had a concurrent history of rhinitis.

The infant was started on topical nystatin due to a presumptive diagnosis of oral thrush, with no improvement.

Dark, blackish, elongated tongue papillae were observed, with a hairy appearance, detachable with a spatula (Fig. 1), with no other changes on physical examination. The diagnosis of *lingua villosa nigra* was made, and the baby was discharged, with instructions for daily gentle tongue brushing. The lesion disappeared after two weeks.

Lingua villosa nigra, also known as black hairy tongue, is a relatively uncommon and benign condition characterized by hypertrophy and elongation of filiform

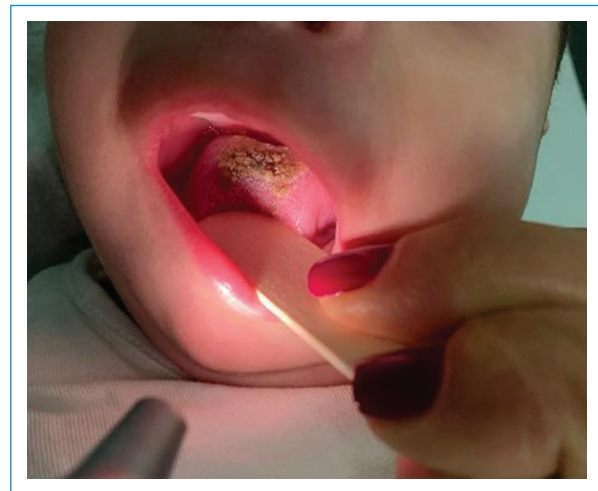


Figure 1. Macroscopic aspect of elongated filiform papillae and green discoloration on the dorsum of the tongue.

*Correspondence:

Maria Limbert
E-mail: maria.g.limbert@gmail.com

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papillae on the dorsum of the tongue, with a hairy appearance. Despite its alarming name, it is typically a harmless condition²⁻⁴.

This condition is more commonly observed in adults, particularly in individuals over 40 years of age, and is extremely rare among infants. In pediatric patients, the occurrence of *lingua villosa nigra*² may be associated with factors such as antibiotic use, mouth breathing, or prolonged use of pacifiers or bottles. Additionally, certain predisposing factors, including a high carbohydrate diet or poor oral hygiene practices, may contribute to the development of the condition in children³.

Prognosis is good, and treatment consists of gentle tongue brushing, resolving in a few days to a few weeks²⁻⁴.

Authors' contribution

For all: Idea behind, and design of, the study, report, review, or other type of paper. Data acquisition from patients, research studies, or literature. Analysis or interpretation of data from patients, research studies, or literature. Drafting the article. Critical review of the article for important intellectual content. Final approval of the version to be published. Agreement to be held accountable for the accuracy or integrity of the paper.

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Conflicts of interest

None.

Ethical disclosures

Protection of human and animal subjects. The authors declare that no experiments were performed on humans or animals for this study.

Confidentiality of data. The authors declare that they have followed the protocols of their work center on the publication of patient data.

Right to privacy and informed consent. The authors have obtained the written informed consent of the patients or subjects mentioned in the article. The corresponding author is in possession of this document.

Use of artificial intelligence for generating text. The authors declare that they have not used any type of generative artificial intelligence for the writing of this manuscript, nor for the creation of images, graphics, tables, or their corresponding captions.

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