

Geographic tongue is a benign condition characterized by inflammation of the tongue (glossitis) that appears in a map-like (geographic) pattern. The normal tongue is covered by a layer of small bumps known as papillae. In affected individuals, certain areas of the tongue are missing these bumps. These affected areas usually appear as smooth, red or pink colored, degenerated (atrophic) patches. Geographic tongue tends to come and go it usually heals without treatment, but will recur again usually affecting a different area of the tongue. Most cases are not associated with any symptoms (asymptomatic) and the condition usually goes away without treatment. Geographic tongue is not associated with any long-term health complications in healthy individuals. The exact cause of geographic tongue is unknown. Some reports in the medical literature suggest that geographic tongue affects females slightly more often than males. It appears to occur with greater frequency in young adults. The prevalence of geographic tongue is unknown, but it is estimated to occur in approximately 3 percent of the general population. A diagnosis of geographic tongue is made based upon a thorough clinical evaluation, a detailed patient history and the characteristic appearance of the tongue lesions associated with this disorder. In most cases, surgical removal and microscopic study (biopsy) of affected tissue is not necessary because of the distinct appearance of the tongue.