

## Clinical Image

# Hyperpigmentation of the Tongue due to Interferon

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A 25 year old male presented with recent onset blackish pigmentation of his tongue (Figure 1) which he had noted for past 2 weeks. He had been previously evaluated for incidentally detected elevated transaminase levels which were found to be due to chronic hepatitis C infection. He was found to harbour infection with genotype 3 and high HCV RNA levels. The patient had been initiated on therapy with pegylated interferon  $\alpha$  2-a 180  $\mu$ g/week with daily ribavirin (800mg) 10 weeks back and had achieved an undetectable level at 4 weeks (rapid virological response). The patient was assured about the benign nature of the hyperpigmentation and agreed to continue treatment.



**Figure 1** Blackish pigmentation of the tongue.

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Submitted: 15 June 2014

Accepted: 17 June 2014

Published: 04 July 2014

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Hyperpigmentation of tongue can result from number of causes including systemic diseases like Addison's disease, local lesions like melanoma and oral lichen planus or can be physiological [1]. Drugs like interferon, minocycline or bismuth subsalicylate can also cause hyperpigmentation of tongue and drug history must form an important part of evaluation of such patients [2]. The tongue hyperpigmentation with interferon is usually asymptomatic, more common in dark-skinned individuals and may be associated with concurrent gum, and oral mucosal involvement. Upregulation of receptors of melanocyte stimulating hormone on melanocytes is believed to be responsible [3]. The hyperpigmentation resolves slowly after interferon is stopped and there is no need to halt therapy [1,2].

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