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PanAfrican Medical Journal

Images in clinical medicine

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Received: 12 Mar 2026 - **Accepted:** 26 Mar 2026 - **Published:** 30 Jun 2026

Keywords: Addison's disease, adrenal insufficiency, oral hyperpigmentation, tongue pigmentation, clinical image

Funding: This work received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or non-profit sectors.

Cite this article: Shreya Parkhi et al. A pigmented tongue unmasking Addison's disease: a rare clinical image. Pan African Medical Journal. 2026;54(67). 10.11604/pamj.2026.54.67.52139

Available online at: https://www.panafrican-med-journal.com//content/article/54/67/full

A pigmented tongue unmasking Addison's disease: a rare clinical image

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Image in medicine

A young female patient presented with complaints of generalized weakness, fatigue, and reduced appetite for several months. On oral examination, diffuse dark brown to black pigmentation was observed over the dorsal surface of the tongue. The pigmentation appeared irregular but asymptomatic and was clearly visible during routine inspection of the oral cavity. Oral mucosal hyperpigmentation is a recognized manifestation of primary adrenal insufficiency and may precede other cutaneous features. Based on the clinical findings and systemic symptoms, further endocrine evaluation was undertaken. Laboratory investigations revealed low morning serum cortisol levels (3.2 µg/dL) with

elevated adrenocorticotropic hormone levels (120 pg/mL), supporting the diagnosis of Addison's disease. Differential diagnoses considered included pigmented fungiform papillae of the tongue, geographic tongue, and drug-induced oral pigmentation. The patient was started on corticosteroid replacement therapy along with supportive management, following which improvement in fatigue and general well-being was observed on follow-up. This case highlights the importance of early recognition of oral manifestations in diagnosing systemic endocrine disorders.

Figure 1: diffuse dark brown to black pigmentation involving the dorsal surface of the tongue in a patient with Addison's disease