

The “shaggy esophagus”

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The “shaggy esophagus” has been used to describe the appearance of severe *Candida* esophagitis, as seen on esophagography. An early description of this distinctive radiologic appearance occurred in 1960 by Kaufman et al. [1]. The esophageal mucosal contour is grossly irregular which is caused by numerous coalescent pseudomembranes and plaques with trapping of barium between them (Fig. 1) [2]. This appearance can be likened to shag carpet (Fig. 2). *Candida* esophagitis in its milder form is characterized by multiple linear longitudinal lesions that have a plaque-like appearance with adjacent areas of preserved normal mucosa [2].

Candida esophagitis is the most common cause of infectious esophagitis and primarily occurs in immunocompromised patients [3]. Predisposing factors include HIV/AIDS, immunosuppressive therapy, diabetes mellitus, esophageal dysmotility, antibiotic use, and malignancy. Patients typically present with dysphagia and odynophagia often with simultaneous oral thrush. AIDS should be highly suspected when a “shaggy” esophagus is observed as this degree of mucosal irregularity is rarely seen in other immunocompromised conditions [4]. Therefore, this radiologic finding can raise suspicion of an otherwise unknown AIDS diagnosis. Both severe forms of *Candida* esophagitis and herpes esophagitis can present with the shaggy esophagus on double contrast barium swallow. A milder form of herpes esophagitis usually presents as focal ulcerations with normal intervening mucosa, rather than the longitudinal plaques seen in mild *Candida* esophagitis.

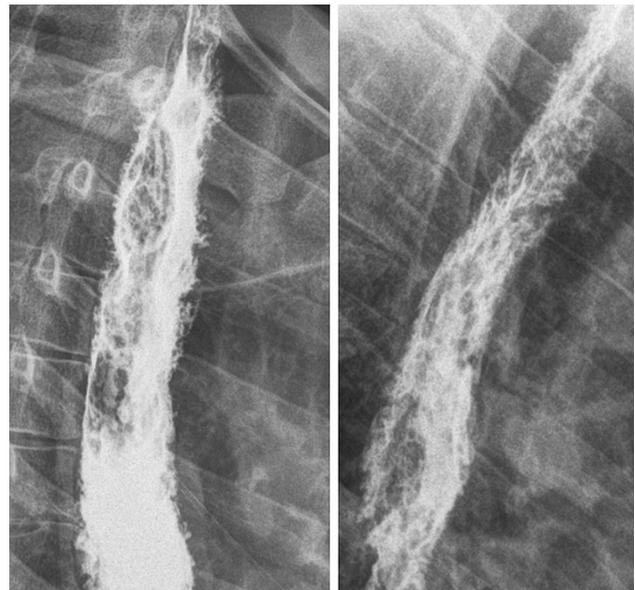


Fig. 1. Two oblique barium swallow images of the proximal and mid esophagus demonstrating the “shaggy” appearance secondary to inflammation, ulcerations, and pseudomembranes seen in a patient with proven severe esophageal candidiasis.



Fig. 2. Close-up image of shag carpeting mimicking the shaggy mucosal border of severe esophageal candidiasis.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent Statement of informed consent was not applicable since the manuscript does not contain any patient data.

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