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Why does my practitioner look at my tongue?

By Jocelyn Joy, MS. L.Ac.

Looking at the tongue is one of several important diagnostic tools in Chinese Medicine and is mentioned in classic Chinese Medical texts as far back as 403BC-221BC. It is based on the idea that external appearances reflect the internal condition of the body.

For diagnostic purposes the tongue is divided into regions which reflect specific organ systems; Heart, Lung towards the front, Stomach in the center, Liver and Gallbladder on the sides, and the Kidneys, Bladder and Intestines towards the rear. (Please see diagram at bottom of page.)

Compared to Pulse Diagnosis it is quite easy to learn and can yield a lot of useful information about a person's internal landscape. When I ask a patient to stick out their tongue the main things I am looking at are listed below.

A) Size of Tongue;

- a. Big usually means digestion problems and/or fluid build-up.
- b. Small can mean dryness and heat, especially if it is red (heat can mean inflammation or infection)

B) Marks on tongue;

- a. Cracks are especially telling of a disharmony within the organ system that is represented by the area that has a crack. For example a crack that runs down the middle of the tongue all the way to the tip indicates a Heart disharmony (not necessarily the western concept of the heart, rather a person's emotional health)

C) Coat or Fur of the tongue;

- a. The coating of the tongue should be slightly white and transparent. You should be able to easily see the tongue body and color. It should also be evenly distributed on the tongue.
- b. A thick coat; white, brown or black indicates a major disharmony in the digestive system. The stomach flu will often result in a thick brown or black coating that returns to a lighter color when the body recovers.

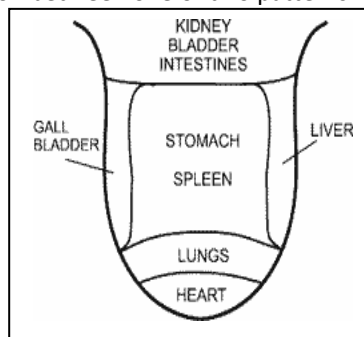
D) Color of Tongue Body;

- a. The body is supposed to be slightly pink, this is healthy
- b. A red body or red dots indicates heat; for example a red tip usually indicates what we call Heart Fire, where the person thinks and talks really fast and probably has trouble sleeping (possibly mania).
- c. A dusky body indicates stagnation of qi and blood. It is especially helpful if this is found in a particular area, then we know where the problem is.
- d. A pale body means blood deficiency. This does not necessarily mean low blood count, anemic, or low iron, but can overlap somewhat. This kind of tongue is often seen in people who do not eat meat.

E) Tongue Movement;

- a. A shaky tongue indicates a digestive system deficiency where the nutrients in food are not being processed and distributed correctly in the body. People with shaky tongues are often tired, especially after a big meal.

So looking at the tongue is just another way we have of peeking into the functioning of the body. Often it is used to confirm a diagnosis when there is a question between one or two patterns. The next page offers several examples.



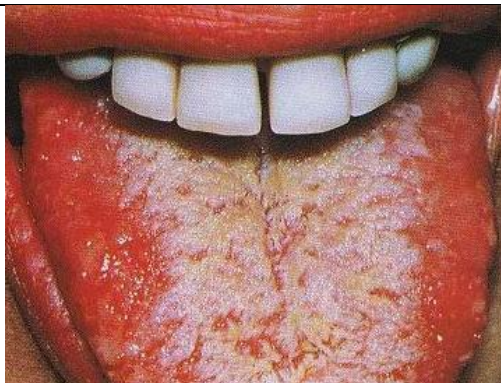
The following pictures illustrate a few different tongues we see in our clinic. You may find one or more that looks similar to yours.

Do not be alarmed! Almost everyone has a disharmony that is reflected on the tongue.

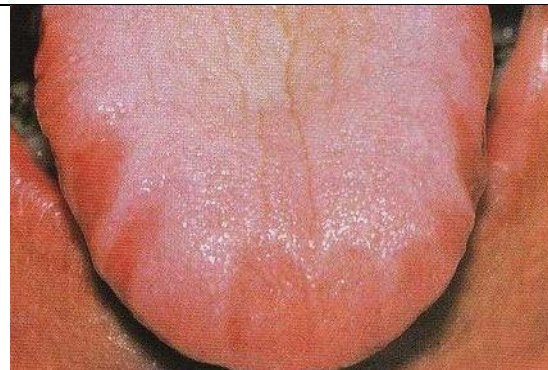
One of the great things about Chinese Medicine is that it can identify, with tools such as Tongue Diagnosis, disharmonies in the body before they have manifested into serious health issues.



Geographic Tongue Fur



Thick White Fur



Scalloped Sides



Red dots and Thick Fur



Central Tongue Crack

We hope you have found this information useful. If you are interested in more information please visit Joy Acupuncture Health Centre online at www.joyacupuncture.com, 2602 First Ave., Suite 103 San Diego, Ca 92103, 619-322-4492