

We're going to talk about one of my favorite subjects.

👅 Tongue diagnosis in Chinese medicine.

I love tongue diagnosis because it's really reliable and to me it's easier than pulse diagnosis. Do you agree? I think we all agree on that.

was in TCM college, what surprised me about tongue diagnosis was that it was not easy to do and not in the way you think. more you practice, the better.

Keep looking at as many tongues as possible, right? That's what we were told, and that's how we get better, of course. So we'd look at each other's tongue in school, but then, when I came out of school, I went and asked all my friends and people I knew if I could look at their tongue, because I had practiced pulse with them, I had practiced looking at their nails, and hair, and face, and observation, the palms, all the observation, palpation, and even inquiry we learn in school, I went and practiced on my friends.

When it came to tongue, the surprise about it was that nobody wanted to open their mouth and show me their tongue. I had no idea. I don't know if this happened to you, but for me, a lot of my friends were like, no, it's private. I'm not showing you my tongue. So that was interesting. Did you have to deal with this?

Because I sure did. So I practice a lot with my classmates, with clinic patients in school, but also on television.

So I would look at singers like Céline Dion. I remember when I was in school, *Titanic*, the movie came out. And of course the big song from Céline Dion was *My Heart Will Go On*.

And when she's belting it out, her mouth is open for 3 seconds, cause she's got this high voice. And so you could see her tongue.

And I remember looking saying, Wow, she is so depleted. She is so blood deficient. Her tongue was so pale and it had really, really big pronounced teeth marks all around the edges.

So that gives us clues, right? That's really interesting. So we're going to talk about all this today and how

👅 Tongue diagnosis is such a beautiful pillar of TCM diagnosis.

Oh, let's do this.

Welcome to acupro, A show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture. Easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I am your host, Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students and like you in changing the world one patient at a time. My goal is to share my passion for TCM and empower you to achieve superior patient care.

I love to showcase the amazing benefits of acupuncture because after all, acupuncture rocks.

There are four methods of diagnosis in Chinese medicine, inquiry being the first one and probably the biggest one because that's what we use a lot in consultation and we ask as many details as possible so we can grab clues like detectives and make a perfect Chinese medicine diagnosis and in turn we can select a right treatment plan for that patient.

Now, after inquiry, which is the biggest one, I think the second biggest one is observation. So we observe the demeanor of the person, the way they speak, the color of their face, their lips, are they cracked, do we look at their hair, their nails, their palm. And of course, we look at the tongue. Now, in consultation, I usually do all my inquiry while I observe the patient.

And then, once that's done, I ask for a palm to look at nails, to look at the tongue. And then, I take the pulse and I do palpation when they are on a treatment table. So we can palpate the body as well. That's the third method of diagnosis in TCM. Not just the pulse, but the body as well for tenderness, for points of tender, for swelling, for areas that are enlarged, right?

So palpation is a great one to use as well. And the last one are listening and smelling, which are much smaller, but still very useful in clinical practice.

If you need help with your diagnosis, I have tons of tools.

I have a 90 minutes masterclass where I give you the framework on how you can make a TCM diagnosis very easily.

My TCM teacher used to say there is no wrong treatment in TCM, only the wrong diagnosis. So it's the hardest part of TCM. It's the most challenging part of TCM. But it's the most exciting one because we treat the person as a whole and that's so much better than just treating the symptoms, right? So when it comes to observation, tongue is a big pillar of Chinese medicine diagnosis.

It is a reliable method that complement our inquiry method, now the tongue can get affected by if the patient just came to see you and they just had coffee, it might change the coat into a brownish yellowish color. Now the tongue. coat is the only part that can be affected. So if someone had a drink that had blue color in it or ate something that had a lot of coloring in it, it will show on the tongue, right?

So that also will show. The coat of the tongue can be affected by what the patient has just done, but we can ask question to reinforce that. And of course, if someone smokes, the tongue coating also would be a different color, but the rest of the tongue, the body of the tongue, the shape and the moisture will not necessarily be affected.

Sometimes the moisture can be affected specifically with smoking, for example, but usually the patient will have written down that they smoke on your intake form.

So you will know why the tongue is looking a certain way. Make sense? So let's look at tongue observation four components and how we can differentiate them.

1, the body of the tongue, the color of the body of the tongue, which reflects the state of qi, blood, and the yin organs.

Second, the coding of the tongue indicates the state of yang organ. and pathogens, like damp and cold and heat.

The moisture of the tongue indicates the state of body fluids, that makes sense.

And number 4: SHAPE indicates the states of nutritive Qi, which is Ying Qi, and blood.

Now let's look at the easiest part of diagnosing the tongue, which is the tongue map.

When we look at the map, we can see that the tip is the heart, the front, which is right behind the heart, is the lung, in the center is spleen and stomach, just like in our body, right? Digestive system is at the center, the lung and heart are in the upper jiao.

So you can see when it's divided into the upper, middle, and lower jiao. It's the same way. It's the whole trunk. Now we're going to have in the lower jiao all the kidney, bladder, large intestine, small intestine that are the same when we divide the upper, middle, and lower jiao in the body. And then of course on the sides of the tongue, we're going to have the liver and gallbladder.

The liver and gallbladder are always located on the side because obviously The liver and gallbladder are located on the right, but because in Chinese medicine the pancreas is also part of the digestive system and the liver and gallbladder, which is on the left, it kind of connotate that way.

So, people ask me often, where's the pancreas?

The pancreas kind of in TCM has a little bit of a two different things. It's part of the spleen, and then it's part of the Part of the liver and you can see that because the spleen and the pancreas are very close together as organs So spleen, stomach, liver and gallbladder are very much related They're all on the tongue in the middle part and sides, but it's in the middle It's not in the front and it's definitely not in the roots.

Make sense?

Diagnosis has to be the hardest part of Chinese medicine. We always say there is no wrong treatment in TCM, only the wrong diagnosis. This is why I created my second book Chinese Medicine Made easy to make it easy to grasp using a lot of colorful visuals. I have included all Chinese Medicine Foundation.

Yin Yang five element, ZK four and all of it. All diagnosis, of course, including tongue and pulse practice case studies to help you improve your skills, as well as give you access to my online fillable intake form to use with your own patients. You can download the digital version on any device and it comes with many video links to complement it.

Or if like me, you like to read a real book, the hard copy ships. All over the world. Before you invest in this book, you can download a sample of it to make sure that the format of the book is everything you were looking for, because I wanna make sure that you are absolutely benefiting from it. Listen to what people have to say about my green book.

Chinese Medicine Made Easy. The more I read, the more I like this book. It is simple to follow. All information is super organized with great pictures, makes memorizing a lot easier. This book will definitely make my learning a lot more productive. Yay. So happy to hear that you've done it again. You are amazing.

I wish we had your resources 20 years ago back in TCM School. This also makes my day because this is why I do what I've been doing with Acupro Academy for quite a few years now. To support everyone, check out the links in the show notes below, or go to my website acupro academy.com and click the shop tab on the menu bar and get your copy today.

Now let's start with looking at the tongue body color. So the body of the tongue, not the coat, and the color. We can only have five colors affecting the body of the tongue.

Red, crimson, which is really deep red, purple, blue, and pale. Now, let's look at the difference between all of them. If a tongue is red, it's obviously, we know, we understand, it's heat. But the heat can come from excess or deficiency. If it is in excess heat, we're going to have a yellow coat on the tongue.

Think of excess, so more coats, so a yellow coat on the tongue. If it's due to yin deficiency, there will be no coat on the tongue and probably will have a crack or two or more depending on the depth of the yin deficiency. Because yin deficiency means the body fluids are drying.

Now excess heat can lead to yin deficiency, right? The second one is crimson, which is that deep red, like a deep red wine. If you're a wine person, you know what I'm talking about. That indicates body fluid exhaustion.

or excess fire. Now, the difference between excess heat, which is a red tongue with a yellow coat, and excess fire is fire is so strong it dries the body fluid, So the coat will no longer be there, and probably be cracked as well.

With body fluid exhaustion, the tongue will be very much cracked as well. The third color of the tongue body is purple. Purple is easy, it's always blood stasis. In Chinese medicine, blood stasis is always purple and pain, P and P.

Purple lips, purple tongue, purple bruise, purple nails, and pain, right? So, pain, fixed pain like a migraine or an ankle sprain, pain and purple. The fourth one is blue, or blue-ish, I should say, and this is usually excess cold. So, you know that if someone has hypothermia, their lips would turn blue, their tongue would turn blue, but if it's a slight bluish, it means that there's excess internal cold, not external cold.

External cold is a pathogen, and it would show on the coat, okay? Internal cold is due maybe to yang deficiency, to excess cold in the uterus, the bluish really indicate internal, not external. So, that's more of a chronic issue.

The fifth color of the tongue body is pale.

Now, there's a lot of degrees of pale, sometimes it could be very pale or less pale. The three main patterns that get affected by pale tongue is chi deficiency, blood deficiency, or yang deficiency. How do you know if it's chi, blood, or yang deficiency?

Well, with a chi deficiency, the tongue is pale. With a blood deficiency, it's pale and the tongue is thin. So the size of the tongue is very small, very thin. For yang deficiency, it's still pale, but this time it's the opposite. It's very swollen, very fat tongue. So that's the difference. She deficiency is pale, blood is pale with fat.

Thin tongue and young deficiency is paired with a swollen tongue. That's how we go about it. Now, can those tongue be mixed up? Absolutely.

One of the tongue I see a lot in clinical practice is what I call lavender, which is a pale tongue with some purplish hue. And we're talking still of the body of the tongue.

That means that this person is probably blood deficient, if the tongue is also very thin, right? Otherwise, it's a chi deficiency. And they also have stagnation. So, blood deficiency and blood stasis is very common to have both at the same time. So, a lavender tongue, specifically in women, I see that a lot.

Now let's look at the tongue coating. First and foremost, let's look at colors. A yellowish coat, as we said earlier, is excess heat, so that usually is going to be on the red body tongue.

Red tongue with a yellow coat, excess heat. Now, you could also have excess heat in an area, let's say in the back, in the lower jiao. Let's say there's an infection, and that's excess heat maybe in the bladder. So you would have a yellow coat, but then the underlying condition of this person is maybe they were very deficient.

So they have a pale tongue. With a yellow coat. Does that make sense? So a normal excess heat tongue would be red with a yellow coat. But, if it's just an infection and it's external pathogen invasion, and the person's already deficient, then you may not see that red tongue. Does that make sense? Okay. The second one is a white coat.

So the whitish coat is the opposite of heat is excess cold. Again, this is an excess cold pathogen. It's mostly external. Like, let's say you have a common cold that's going to be on the tongue. Now the last color that we can have, which is grayish black could be definitely when someone smokes. So if they come in and they have a grayish black and you know, they smoke, you know why, but usually gray, black collar is a very serious disorder.

I'm not talking about the tongue body. I'm talking about the coat. So we really want to try to explain to patients that maybe it's time to go do some tests And to check for a lot of issues depending on what symptoms their experience is because That can actually give us clues that something is wrong and sometimes there's not enough symptoms But if we check early enough, then maybe we can catch some serious disease in advance.

That make sense? So TCM is perfect for preventative health We just need to look at the clues and follow those clues in order to help our patients.

So we talked about the body of the tongue, the coat color of the tongue. Now let's talk about the tongue moisture.

The tongue can have a little moisture to it, , it's not dry or cracked, right?

If it's dried and cracked, there's body fluid deficiency. Or, like we said earlier, if it's a red tongue or crimson and it's cracked, that's excess fire drying the body fluid. When there is body fluid deficiency, the tongue will be cracked. If it's red and cracked, it's probably body fluid and yin deficiency.

Again, the heat is drying the fluid, and so in the long term, there's going to be cracks. The bigger, the deeper the cracks, the worse the condition is, ? And the more cracks there are, the worse the condition is. The opposite is having a greasy tongue. oily kind of coat that looks like almost like a mirror, you could see like something shiny that is excess phlegm or excess damp.

So excess phlegm, excess damp is always a greasy coat. So coating pretty easy, right? Pretty simple.

Obviously it's simple to talk about it, but maybe not simple to actually look at, right? So it's practice, practice, practice.

Last part is to look at the shape of the tongue. And we've already looked at a few already when we talked about pale tongue that was thin, very thin, very small, which is a blood deficiency, or pale tongue that was very swollen, very fat, that's a yang deficiency.

And when there is yang deficiency, We always have water retention like edema in the ankles or excess water because there's not enough fire, not enough yang to circulate the body fluid. And so we end up with some water retention. That's why the tongue is swollen. Makes sense, right? TCM rocks. Come on.

We talked about the cracks. more cracks there are, the more body fluid deficiency. If there is small cracks specifically in the middle of the tongue, like the center, the back, the front, but kind of like the line in the middle, that's more of a yin deficiency.

And if the crack is really, really deep from the root, all the way to the tip, then that could be a kidney essence deficiency. If a tongue has strawberry prickles on them, it literally looks like little red bumps, right? That changes the shape of the tongue.

That is usually toxic heat, so it's an excess heat. Sometimes the tongue will be red where the little bubbles or strawberry prickles will be. Sometimes it will not. But there is toxic heat, which means it's major inflammation in the body. The tongue, we said, can be fat, of course, or swollen, which means yang deficiency, excess damp.

But it can also have teeth marks. This is very common when a swollen tongue is there, that there is teeth marks. Teeth marks are a spleen qi deficiency. Usually because they're on the side of the tongue, they come from liver qi stagnation. So the person's really stressed, their qi stagnates, and then they start worry overthink, being stressed, and they clench their teeth, and now we have teeth marks.

And that's a spleen qi deficiency coming from a liver qi stagnation. As I said earlier, a thin tongue is a blood deficiency. Now, you could also have a Yin deficiency that is a thin tongue as well, if it was red. Okay, but if it's pale and thin, then it's a blood deficiency. If it's red and thin, it's a Yin deficiency.

Yes? Okay. Another thing is, if the tongue is deviated, meaning when the person sticks it out, it goes to one side, that's internal wind. So we have to address the internal wind, and that could also be a precursor for epilepsy attack, for stroke, for anything that's going to create internal wind. So we really want to be mindful of this.

If a tongue is quivering, like a shaking is quivering, it could be that the person is nervous, which makes sense as well. But if it correlates with your symptoms when you ask and you have an inquiry, and you see that this person has spleen qi deficiency already, and the tongue is quivering, that just reinforces your spleen qi deficiency diagnosis.

Now, the last one we haven't talked about is a stiff tongue, which is it comes out and it looks really hard, really stiff. That's also internal wind. So deviation or stiffness can be internal wind.

Wow. Okay. Let's look at some tongues and see how we can put it all together. Yes.

So this person has a purple tongue, right? But it's purplish, not dark purple, right? It's almost purple pale, but not quite pale, but it is definitely purple.

It has a bit of a red tip and a bit of a red sides with teeth marks for sure, we all see that, and a crack in the center. Yes, that makes sense, right? So because there's a crack in the center, that means there's a stomach yin deficiency. Spleen yin deficiency is not very common, that doesn't correlate, that doesn't happen often.

The stomach gets yin deficient much more than the spleen does. So it gets affected by heat, right? That's what it means. Because there's a red tip, that means there's heat in the heart or excess yang, excess heat in the heart. There's also red sides. So that's a liver yang rising,

red sides are liver yang rising. if there's red sides of the tongue, Plus, there is a yellow coat. Now, it's a liver fire. And the tongue, usually on the sides, will be cracked as well because the fire will crack the liver area of the tongue.

Because there is a purple tongue, obviously there's blood stasis. So this whole tongue is a blood stasis with some liver yang rising, heat in the heart, and stomach yin deficiency. Now, it is not super red, it's slightly red.

So the next one is really pale, swollen, with teeth marks. We can see that, right? It might have a bit of a thin, wet coat.

It's a little bit shiny there, but it's very hard to see.

So that is a Spleen Yang Deficiency, right? Because we said Spleen Qi Deficiency is teeth marks. But now it's swollen and pale, which we said that was yang deficiency. So now this is more of a spleen yang deficiency. And if it has a thin wet coat, that is often the case with yang deficiency as well, because there's excess body fluid.

This one is a red tongue with a long midline crack. And many cracks on the sides, right? So what's interesting there is that we see this is a really red tongue, right? And lots of cracks.

So this is a stomach and liver yin deficiency because the stomach is at the center. There's crack on the side which is liver.

So stomach and liver yin deficiency. However, The crack goes all the way to the lungs, so there could be also lung yin deficiency. And I think it's going towards the back and the lower jiao, so this is going to be affecting much more if this continues. There's obviously some body fluid deficiency in this instance because it's so cracked.

I think I could say that the tongue tip is a bit red. If you agree with that, then we know there's some, also some heart yin deficiency. So basically this is a yin deficiency affecting a lot of the organs.

And again, if you're not really sure, when you ask all your inquiry and your questions, this should correlate with the tongue, and it should match.

If it doesn't match, we need to go back to the drawing board and ask more questions, or re look at the tongue.

When people stick their tongue, tell them to relax it. Don't stick it out hard, relax it, just open your mouth, stick it out gently

and then look at the tongue and then 5 10 seconds say okay Take a break give them a break because otherwise the tongue is gonna start Drying the saliva and that's gonna affect the tongue.

Then do it again a second time and see if you see more on that tongue Does that make sense?

Now the next one has a bit of purple pale it's a bit of a lavender specifically at the front. It has a slight crack in the center. And then it has a yellow coat at the root specifically.

It goes a little bit to the center. So there's a little bit of the root and a little bit to the center where there's a yellow coat. So see, yellow coat, it doesn't mean it's super yellow. It's a slight crack. hue of yellow. That's why we need to learn how to observe the tongue well and practice it.

So because it's purple pale, we know there's blood deficiency, blood stasis, and then there's a slight crack. So body fluid deficiency in the stomach area. And then there's excess heat because we have that yellow coat and the lower jiao. It could also come all the way to the stomach because I feel like there's a bit of yellow coat at the stomach area as well

Okay, this one is a beautiful coat. This coat is really thick. She has strawberry prickles. On the front and the tip and a crack in the center. That's a deep crack. And a yellow dry coat. On a purplish tongue .

So the purplish tongue, we know there's blood stasis, but it's also obviously toxic heat in the lung and heart because there's a lot of strawberry prickles in the front specifically.

So a lot of inflammation. She has excess heat in the middle and all the way back to the roots, right? Because that yellow thick coat all the way to the lower jowl. So that would again, Give you clues to ask more questions on what's happening. And then the raised part in the front and then in the back, the kind of like on the coat, there's kind of a little hole.

It's kind of like geographic tongue. So that reinforces that there is some issue with stagnation.

Like I said at the beginning, tongue diagnosis is one of my favorite things to talk about because it's so fun to practice and it gives you such great clues to reinforce your inquiry and the rest of your diagnosis. Remember when you make a Chinese medicine diagnosis, do not just take one thing and it's over.

It's pulling all those clues from all those different methods of diagnosis, including the tongue, to be able to put a whole picture together so we can help our patients.

I hope that was useful to you and in turn your patient.

Thank you so much for spending your time with me today. I truly hope you benefited from this episode, and I would love for you to share it with a friend that may benefit from it as well. Follow the show, live a review, and if you want more, go to my website, acuproacademy.com. I have tons of resources there with treatment protocols, case studies, free courses, and so much more.

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