



Nutritionally Oriented Physical Exam: Tongue Transcript

The tongue is very fascinating.

Before we begin let's make sure that you are aware that any of the information I'm presenting here is not intended to replace a one-on-one relationship with a qualified healthcare professional.

It's also not medical advice and when you are presenting to your clients you need to be really careful and make sure that they are aware that what you are presenting, and what I'm presenting here today, is intended as a sharing of my knowledge, information, clinical research and clinical experience over many years.

I encourage you, and you should encourage your clients, to make their own healthcare decisions based upon your research and in partnership with a qualified healthcare professional. This is especially true for people who are on any medications. I just want to make sure that the things that we talk about in terms of nutrition are not going to interfere with the protocols.

On the left you see what in Chinese medicine is considered a normal tongue. It's got a little bit of a glisten to it but not too much, it's got a little bit of a white coating but not too much. It's a nice pink, it doesn't have scalloped edges, it's just a nice looking tongue. They are hard to find actually, but when we look at the tongue we can map it out, the different parts of the tongue are related to different areas of the body.

The **heart is the very tip** and if you notice somebody that has little lesions or very red spots at the tip of the tongue it might mean that they have some heart heat and you need to be looking at that. The **lung area is right behind the heart** so that would be this area here. Again we are looking for redness, we are looking for irritation, aggravation.

Same thing on the sides, on the **left hand side we have liver** and on the **right hand side we have gallbladder**. Again, we are **looking for areas of ulceration, discoloration, spots**.



Stomach and spleen are in the middle, and when we see a lot of redness there or paleness there we are looking at problems of the **stomach/spleen** which in Chinese medicine is **related to digestion**.

And then finally **the very back**, that's this part here before the taste buds (we don't see the taste buds in this tongue they are further back), that could be **kidney/bladder** and **intestinal stress**. Again what we are looking for are marks there, discolorations and we are going to go through what I've got on the exam form, so you can see specifically what's going on.

Let's look at the tongue, we've already looked at the picture. On this form you can just have people mark little dots, x's whatever, wherever they find redness or irritation.

Shape of the Tongue

The other thing we can look at is the shape of the tongue. This **elliptical shaped** tongue is more of a **normal** tongue. But the **hammer tongue**, you see where it's swollen in the back and in the front, that's indication of **stagnation**, lack of circulation to those parts of the body reflected there.

It could be related to lung/heart and it could be related to kidney/bladder and intestines. In a **rectangular** tongue you see it's not as tapered in the beginning spot where the heart and the lungs are, so it could be indicative of **stagnation in the heart or the lung** area. An **acute triangular** tongue is how it was just described in this particular article, but it's really an elongated tongue, the tongue is long and narrow and that's usually the sign of a **deficiency**. The tongue just isn't getting enough nourishment to be wide and plump and elliptical like it should be. It's more elongated and it's usually a sign of deficiency.

This **obtuse triangular**; see it's triangular but it's super, super swollen, very different from the acute triangular tongue. This is very much a bloated tongue and it's indicative of an **inflammation** somewhere or **bloating in the gut, poor digestion**, and you'd have to be looking further to see what that's related to.

The **square** tongue is somewhat shorter than a typical tongue and wider than a typical tongue so it can be indicative of **stagnation** anywhere in the body, and also of some **inflammation in the heart or the lungs**. Finally we've got the **rounded** tongue and again it's shorter than most tongues and it's a little bit more bloated and it can be indicative of an **inflammation**.



You've got a spot here where you can choose a tongue and then you'll have an idea of what the possible indications are, this one should say square.

Distinguishing Marks On The Tongue

Next we are going to look at **distinguishing marks on the tongue** and I've given you the website where we've taken this from, there's more information. If you really are interested in tongue diagnosis and want to go deeper, you can look there.

This is meant to give you an overview of the things that you could do and get good at pretty quickly. Tongue diagnosis is something that takes years to perfect and those of you who are acupuncturists know that.

I'm just giving you an overview, and many of you who are acupuncturists probably know a whole lot about tongue diagnosis than I do. A **sensitive colon** is often indicated here by this ***horseshoe shaped collection of bumps and dots in the back of the tongue***. It's towards the middle and the back, and other sorts of little lesions

The **kidney disorder** would be indicative of these ***lesions or bumps in the back of the tongue on either side***, small collection whereas right in the middle there is often indicative of a delicate heart.

When you have impressions of the teeth this **scalloped tongue** that's usually malabsorption of nutrients. In Chinese medicine they say it's a ***spleen chi deficiency***, that you ***don't have enough digestive fire*** and you are ***not absorbing*** properly. It can also be indicative of ***allergy***, or an ***inflammation*** somewhere in your body.

When you have **white spots in the back of the tongue** like this one here it's often indicative of ***toxins in your colon*** versus a larger pattern of lesions that are white with a red parameter are more likely to be toxins somewhere in the GI tract not just the colon.

If you have **depressions on the sides** as in this picture the bottom row, first one on the left, it's indicative of ***delicate lungs*** where if it's a frothiness there on the tongue in that same position it might be related to bronchitis. When there are **brown spots indicated on the sides** of the tongue that can be indicative of ***pneumonia***. These **cracks throughout the tongue**, a ***chronic Vata derangement in the colon***. Vata is an ayurvedic term and it's for the person who is very thin and cold and wiry, and it could be chronic dampness in the body.



Marks around the edges of the tongue, around the perimeter of the tongue, are in Chinese medicine considered related to **deep-seated fear, or anxiety**. And then a **deep groove down the center** of the tongue is **emotional** and often is related to **problems along the spinal column**.

When you are filling out this form you just circle wherever you find the lesions, make notes if there are specific colors.

You don't have to do the diagnosis on the spot, you can go back and read through your notes. Take time to look at the information you have gathered. Set it up so that you talk about the results of the exam *after* you do the exam so that you are not on the spot, until you get really good at this.

If you are doing it on the phone and you are doing it through Skype or through video or you are having them do it for themselves, then you can just have them look and you'd go to the mirror, use a magnifying glass and mark what they see.

Color of the Tongue

In terms of what **color is your tongue**, well **pink or multi-colored is normal**.

I was surprised to learn that multi-colored is normal. I found a really good website, which I'm giving you a link to, where you can take through and mark you just say oh this is my tongue, this is my tongue subsequently and it tells you all the things that are going on in your system. It's quite a nice resource and I've given you the link in the slide presentation.

But if it's pink, a nice pink, like the picture we saw earlier, that's a normal color tongue, but also especially in people of darker skin a multi-colored tongue is actually normal where there are different colorations throughout. A **pale red** (not a bright beefy red) is indicative of **mild heat**, whereas a **beefy red** is indicative of a **lot of heat** in the body. It could be related to fever, it could be related to inflammation in the body there are a lot of things that it could be related to.

A **purple tongue** indicates **poor circulation**. A **very pale tongue** indicates a **low metabolism; poor circulation**. It could be **classic anaemia**, or it could be what is termed in Chinese medicine: **blood deficiency**.



Coatings

Coating is normal, believe it or not. It's **normal to have a thin, white coating** on the tongue. If you have **no coating** on the tongue it's indicative of a **weak digestive fire** or **dehydration**. The coating should be thin, normal, and white.

If the coating is **thick** it could indicate you have **cold dampness in your body**. It's like one of those miserable winter days happening inside your body where you can't get warm; you are very damp and cold. It could be that you've got **phlegm** mucous production in your body. It could be that you have **poor digestion**.

Now let's go look at the **coating color**.

White is, as I said normal. If it's a **light yellow or a dirty white** there is a **little bit of heat in the body** or maybe you've got a **cold or a flu** that you are fighting off.

If it's substantially yellow like a **bright yellow** that's a definite sign of **heat** somewhere in the body. It could also be indicative of **anxiety, depression, infection** or it could be that the person has **recently smoked a cigarette or drinks coffee** or has coffee recently or just had a big meal. Finally if the color goes to **brown or black** it's a really **strong heat**, or it could be cold. It could also happen from **long-term smoking** and also **bismuth** which is **in drugs**, many drugs, long-term chronic intake of bismuth like bismuth antacids can be a problem that causes brown or black tongue.

Tongue Signs and Interpretation

Let's look at a few of the other **tongue signs and the interpretation**. Some of this is repetition but I've repeated it so that you can study it and you can mark it in multiple places and get an idea of what it all means.

If a tongue is **tender to touch** or it's sore it could be a **deficiency of vitamin B12 or folic acid or iron**. If it's pale red that's normal, pink or pale red, beefy red is excess heat. Let me distinguish between pale red and pink; pink is normal and some people call the pink pale red but if it's actually **darker than pink and less than beefy** that's an indication of the **beginning of heat signs**.

But a **beefy red** is definitely excess heat **and** if it's **red at the tip**, it could be because you are **overeating** or you **don't absorb well**.



You could have ***too much fat in your diet***, you could have too much fried food, you could have ***inadequate fibre***. A red tip could also be indicative of ***excessive heart fire***.

If the **back of the tongue** tends to be **dark grey or reddish** color that could be indicative of ***kidney or adrenal weakness***.

If you have a **chronic, furry coating** on your tongue it's oftentimes related to ***digestive enzymes imbalance***, not enough digestive enzymes and imbalance of friendly to ***unfriendly flora*** in your bowel, it could also be ***food allergies***.

And then the last of the tongue signs, let's take a look through these. Do this on yourself so you've got a feeling of how it is to do this, and how much of it you might want to ask people to do on themselves. Also you might be picking and choosing pieces of this to do based on what the person is coming to you for and what you are finding.

If there is a yellowish coating like I said before, it can be a sign of heat. If there is a **cottage cheese-like growth or coating**, it could be a ***yeast infection***.

If the **edges** of the tongue are **scalloped and have teeth marks** on them, it's suggestive of ***allergies, poor digestion, low pancreatic enzymes, low vitamin B6*** or even ***thyroid problems***.

Geographic tongue looks like a map. There are spots on the tongue that are different colored and different texture and this is called geographic tongue. It can be coming from ***low B vitamins, especially folic acid and B12***. It can also be related to ***low vitamin D*** or ***low zinc***; but other things can cause it ***gluten sensitivity*** or ***wheat allergy*** can cause it.

If you find an **excessively shiny or smooth** tongue it could be ***deficiency*** of some of your ***B vitamins*** like ***B12 and folic acid***. It could be ***iron deficiency***. It could be an ***allergic reaction*** or even an ***early sign of a blood sugar imbalance or diabetes***.

If the tongue is **purplish** it's often indicative of ***inadequate levels***, not enough ***vitamin B12***. If it's very **beefy or enlarged** it can be ***inadequate*** levels of ***pantothenic acid***.

if it's **black or hairy looking**, it can be a ***side effect of antacids*** or like I said before bismuth containing products like *Pepto-Bismol*, they cause a blackness and also can cause a hairiness.



Study Resources

Now that we've taken a look at tongue diagnosis, a mini introduction to tongue diagnosis. I want to give you some more ways that you can get further access.

Tongue diagnosis is something that you can continue to study over and over and get really good at. This book is an amazing resource, I picked this book up when I was in Chinese medicine, actually before I started, it's what prompted me to get started in going back to school, into acupuncture school, because I was in the store that the acupuncture school here in Austin has, and I just love looking at the books, and this book really struck me and I bought it, and I bought another book on acupuncture for the treatment of depression because I was working with a lot of depression.

And I said 'I want to go back and study this further' and I did. I really love this book because it has pictures, it has descriptions of what the things mean but then it has pictures of lots of tongues and what their interpretation is; so it's very helpful, lots and lots of pictures, and that's the way you learn tongue diagnosis, it's by doing it a lot.

The other thing I found was this really cool website, this www.eagleherbs.com. It's a self test so you click on this link. Let me show you quickly. This is how it looks, and I love it because it starts out, here is the normal tongue, the elusive normal tongue appearance.

It has a cell phone version; I haven't tried that one yet. Basically it tells you a little bit about it, and you click start. At any point you can undo your last choice, so you can actually use it to study. You say okay what does pink tongue mean? So you click on pink tongue and it's normal, it tells you about it. And then from there, you can say well, let's pick the coating on the tongue and so you can choose the coating on the tongue.

But if you wanted to go back and study what red tongue meant, you can undo your last choice and go back, click on 'bright red' tongue, and it tells you 'too much heat, not enough cooling' etc and then you get again to choose the coating. So you can just keep going back and forth looking and studying these, and really getting a sense of what they all mean, so great pictures and learning tool. I encourage you to go here and study it and take it all the way through.