TONGUE DIAGNOSIS

Mary Anne Matta

BODY COLOR

Indicates condition of Blood, nutritive Ying Qi, and Yin organs.

PALE	**Deficiency**	If wet or swollen – Yang Deficiency	If dry – Blood Deficiency	If sides pale – LV Blood Def	If thin – Qi & Blood Def.		
RED	**Heat**	+ Yellow Coat – Full Heat	Without coat– Empty Heat	If tip is red – HT Heat	If sides are red – LV Heat- bilateral GB Heat- unilateral	If Center is red – ST Heat	Red spots – Latent Heat or Blood Stasis
SPOTS	**Blood Level Disharmony**	RED SPOTS usually indicate Heat, unless located on the Lung area where it usually indicates an acute EPF. Red spots indicate the presence of Heat in the Ying or Blood level where the organs are accumulating Heat Toxins. If they are large, they might indiciate Blood Stasis					
		WHITE SPOTS due to SP/ST Qi Deficiency combining with Heat. The tongue may also have sores and pus (Damp.)					
		BLACK SPOTS usually a long term stasis of Qi and Blood combing with Heat and drying up fluids.					
PURPLE	**Blood Stasis**	Red purple – Heat & Blood Stasis	Blue Purple – Cold & Blood Stasis	Purple on sides – LV Blood stasis	Purple in center – ST Blood Stasis		
BLUE	**Cold**	Blue typicially indicates Cold, but is also indicative of Blood Stasis, especially if it is also purple. A light purple, bluish purple, or greenish purple tongue body color can indicate Cold + Blood Stagnation.					
GREEN	**Stagnation**	A green tongue body usually indicates Excess Yin Cold or the presence of a strong Excess evil with weak Zheng Qi. The Yang is not properly moving Blood and Fluids and there is Stagnation in the body. Also, Internal Wind is possible with a green tongue body.					

BODY SHAPE

Indicates state of Blood and nutritive Ying Qi.

THIN	**Deficiency**	If pale – Blood Deficiency	If red – Yin Deficiency				
SWOLLEN	**Damp**	Opposite of thin. Swollen is fat	If also pale & moist Yang Def → Damp	If red – Damp Heat	If red & sore – Too much alcohol HT & SP Heat	If engorged – Phlegm or Stagnant Fluids	Swollen sides – LV Yang Rising or LV FIre
		Half swollen – Weakening of Channels	Local Swelling – Qi & Blood Stasis	Swollen Tip – HT involvement	Swollen wet edges SP Yang Def.	Swollen LU area- SP Def → Damp Phlegm in Lungs	
STIFF	**Wind**	If blue purple – Impending Wind Stroke	If bright red – HT & PC Heat disturbing Shen	If thick sticky coat - Phlegm Misting HT			
FLABBY	**Deficiency of Body Fluids**	Opposite of Stiff	If pale – Qi & Blood Def	If dark red + cracks - Heat burning Fluids	If scarlet color – Exhausted Yin		
LONG	**Heat**	The tongue cannot retract. This is an indication of heat in the channels, usually the Heart. This Excess Heat is seen with a red tip and indicates Heart Fire or Phlegm Fire Misting the Heart. The patient may also report a numb feeling in their tongue					
SHORT	**Deficiency**	The patient cannot show the entire tongue; this is a more severe disease. It can be due to Stagnation of Cold contracting the tongue. If the tongue is wet, the Cold is likely from Yang Xu. If red, then its from Yin Xu. A short frenulum is a normal inherited trait and does not signify disease.					
CRACKED	**Heat**	Shallow wide crack not reaching the tip – ST Yin Deficiency	If crack extends from midline to tip – HT Disharmony	Transverse cracks in the middle or sides – Chronic SP Def			
SCALLOPED or QUIVERING	**SP Deficiency**	A Scalloped tongue results from a tongue that pushes against the teeth leaving marks on the sides of the tongue. If the body color is normal, it is SP Qi Deficiency. If the color is pale and wet, it is Yang Deficiency. A quiver also indicates SP Qi Deficiency.					
UNUSUAL MOVEMENT	**Interior Wind**	All unusual movements of the tongue can be due to Wind. This includes Moving, Lolling, Wagging, Rolling, Quivering, Trembling, or Deviated. To be sure why there is Wind, and whether it is Interior or Exterior, one must look at the presenting symptoms. Examples: If a patient is febrile, a quivering tongue is due to external Wind Heat. If the tongue is pale, it is Internal Wind due to Blood Def in HT & SP. In children, unusual movements, like a deviation, may indicate a developmental problem.					

COAT

Indicates the state of Yang Organs and particularly the Stomach. A normal coat is thin and white.

THICK	**Interior**	A coat moving from thin to thick will indicate a pathogen penetrating deeper into the interior. Hence, a thick coat usually indicates more of a severe and internal disease or that an EPF has gone deep. Also, it may otherwise indicate Food Stagnation.				
THIN	**Mild or Normal**	A thin coat indicates mild disease either Exterior or Interior. A coat that gets thinner over time is a good prognosis and means the disease is diminishing. A thin white coat is also seen in a normal tongue.				
ABSENT	**Yin Deficiency**	Since the tongue coat is an indication of ST Fluids, an absent coat is an indication of Yin Fluids drying up. If the tongue is red, peeled, shiny, mirrored and no coating is present – KD Yin Deficiency. If the coat is only absent in the center – ST Yin Deficiency				
WHITE	**Full Cold**	A thin white coat is normal	Thin white coat + cold sx = Cold	+ Wet and pale or White like snow – Damp Cold	Dry powder white– Cold → Heat drying Fluids	A simultaneous White & Yellow Coat indicates: (1) A Shaoyang Pattern, one that is moving back and forth from interior to exterior or (2) A Cold pattern turning to Heat, or simultaneously Hot & Cold
YELLOW	**Full Heat**	Slight yellow – Wind Cold or Wind Heat	Burnt yellow – Heat → Fire	Dirty Yellow – ST & Intestinal Damp Heat	Wet, swollen & sore – Damp Heat or Yang Deficiency	
GREY/BLACK	**Extreme Heat or Cold**	Grey & Black can indicate either extreme Heat or Cold. As it moves from grey (and also burnt yellow) to black, it indicates the progression or severity. If wet → extreme Cold. If dry → extreme Heat.				
ROOT	**State of Kidney**	A rooted tongue is firmly attached to the surface and cannot be scraped off. A coating without root rests on the surface of the tongue, but can easily be removed or scraped off. It can seem foamy or phlegmy. This usually indicates impairment of the Spleen, Stomach, and Kidneys.				
WET	**Yand Def. or Cold**	When the tongue is wet, it is because Cold (weather Deficiency Cold or Full Cold) is inhibiting the metabolizing of fluids. Thin white coat – Empty Cold Thick White Coat – Full Cold				
DRY	**Injury to Body Fluids**	A dry tongue can result from Heat or Cold. Heat will dry body fluids, while Cold will obstruct fluids. Also, Blood moistens the tissues, so Bloody Deficiency can also cause a dryness.				

Channels reaching the Tongue

HT	The Luo connecting channel connects to the root of the tongue.
KD	An internal branch of the primary channel terminates at the root of the tongue.
BL	A branch of the sinew channel binds to the root of the tongue.
SJ	A branch of the San Jiao sinew channel links with the root of the tongue.
SP	An internal branch of the primary channel spreads over the lower surface
	The tongue is also penetrated by the Spleen Divergent channel

Tongue Presentations

Yang Deficiency –always wet, pale, flabby, swollen, tender
Full Cold – always white coat, can be pale, moist, short, blue, black
Yin Deficiency –always no coat, thin, dry, red, cracks, peeled
Full Heat – always yellow coat, red, dry, striated, cracks
Blood Deficiency – always pale, flaccid, thin, dry, thin coat
Blood Stasis – always purple, tough, course, swollen
Damp Heat – red, flabby, swollen, yellow coat
Phlegm Damp – always thick sticky coat, , swollen, stiff